

Country Sermons



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COUNTRY SERMONS

NEW SERIES, VOLUME IV.

SERMONS ON THE GOSPELS FOR THE CHURCH YEAR

By REV. F. KUEGELE

Author of "Book of Devotion," "Your Confirmation Vow,"
"Christophoros," Etc.

SECOND EDITION, REVISED

MOTTO:—"I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto
salvation to every one that believeth." *Romans 1:16*

AUGUSTA PUBLISHING COMPANY

Crimora, Virginia

1908

COUNTRY SERMONS

20th SERIES, VOLUME IV

SERMONS ON THE GOSPELS FOR THE CHURCH YEAR

BY REV. F. KUEGELE

Author of "The Church Year," "The Christian Year,"

Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1908

By REV. F. KUEGELE

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REV. F. KUEGELE

AMERICAN METHODIST PUBLISHING COMPANY

Minneapolis, Minn.

1908

PUBLISHERS' PREFACE.

The sermons comprised in this volume are a reprint of volumes III. and IV. of the old series of "Country Sermons." One discourse on a Free Text which had been appended to volume IV. of the old series has been omitted, and a sermon for Michaelmas has been inserted, because this seemed more appropriate in a series of discourses on the regular Gospels for the Church year. The Text, Luke 12, 16-21, is given as the Gospel for Harvest Home in the hymnal issued at Columbus, O., and as Scripture Lesson in the Common Service. Self-chosen are only the texts for Confirmation and the Mission Festival.

For this second edition these sermons have been given a careful reading by the author, and Scripture references have been inserted. These references can easily be omitted when reading a sermon in the family circle or in public worship.

As to the contents of these sermons we here transcribe the commendatory words of the Rev. C. L. Janzow in his preface to the first edition, where he says:

"These sermons need no praise or recommendation, because they most vigorously recommend themselves to the reader by their contents and form. In full keeping with the motto, (Rom. 1, 16: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation,") from which the author preached his inaugural sermon to his present congregation, the aim and end of these sermons is to bring the hearer and reader unto salvation through the knowledge of Jesus Christ. They bear the stamp of fervent prayer, of careful study and meditation, and of spiritual experience, those signs and marks of a genuine Theo-

logian. They contain *nothing* but the Truth of God, "saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say," so that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ. And they contain this Truth in all its purity; for the author in the school of the Holy Spirit has well learned that sublime art "to rightly divide the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2, 15), to preach the law in all its severity and the Gospel in all its sweetness, to terrify the self-righteous and secure, and to comfort the despairing souls, to bring to the knowledge of sin, and to faith in Christ Jesus, and to make them rejoice with divine joy and certainty of their eternal salvation. Here we find the proper application of the Word of God for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, and for comfort and consolation. The heart and soul of these sermons is the doctrine of justification, that a poor sinner is justified before God not by works or merits of his own, but by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ, the only Redeemer, but nevertheless *all* the counsel of God for the salvation of sinners is declared in them."

To this we wish to add the remark that these sermons, being published substantially as they were delivered from the pulpit, can and do lay no claim to being a complete commentary on the Gospels. Not every text is treated in full. But we do know that what they give is wholesome and useful, and our prayer is that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ may own them and make them a blessing.

THE PUBLISHERS.

Crimora, Va., May 20, 1908.

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Dedictory

**These Sermons are
Dedicated to the
Coyner's Evangelical Lutheran Congregation
from whose Pulpits they were delivered**

**May Jesus Christ the chief Shepherd and
Bishop of His flock bless their frequent Perusal
for the Instruction Comfort and Strengthening
of the Souls committed to the Author's Care**

I. SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

TEXT: And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. And if any man say aught unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass. And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, and brought the ass and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strewed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest. Matt. 21, 1-9.

BELoved IN CHRIST, THE LORD!

We to-day begin a new church year. Wisely did the church arrange so as to begin her year a month before the beginning of the secular year. The noblest and best first. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." That which the church year brings is more precious than anything which the secular year can bring; and to make provision for the soul, is more needful, than to make provision for the body. Properly, therefore, does the church begin her year before the beginning of the secular year. And as we begin the church year first, so all the year round that which it brings should be and remain foremost in our hearts and minds.

Without the church year the civil year is only vanity; for "what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul"? Matt. 16, 26. Will not every one who eagerly employs the civil year to gather earthly treasures and gives no heed to the church year be obliged to confess at the end of his lifetime: I have lived a lost life. In the church

year I did not lay up for myself treasures in heaven, and now I must lose that also which I gained in the worldly year. But the church year with its Sundays and festivals makes time the portal of a blessed eternity; for out of the Gospel, the seed which is scattered in the church year, grows forth that golden fruit which abides forever. With a sacred joy we should annually greet the coming of Advent, because our time of grace is not yet ended, and we should gird our loins anew to put in the sickle and to reap another harvest for the soul.

But when do we seek the kingdom of God? What must we do to obtain His righteousness? To seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness is the same as to come to Jesus. Come to Jesus! If you are with Him, you are in the kingdom of God and have the righteousness which is of God. Come to Jesus, then you begin the new church year right.

Come to Jesus, is a subject which is much preached, and preached in many different ways. Sometimes it is preached right, but more frequently wrong. It is preached right, when the hearers are taught that in themselves there is no health, no ability, no strength to come to Jesus, but that He alone is all unto them; for then they are led away from themselves unto Him alone. But this subject: Come to Jesus, is preached wrong, when it is so preached as to cause the hearers to think that of themselves they have the ability to come to Jesus; for then they are not led unto Him, but are taught to rely upon themselves. Whenever it is preached that Christ is the world's Savior, who has prepared salvation for all men, but His salvation is, so to say, hedged in, and it remains for man to clear away the hedge, and to place himself into possession of this salvation, then He is preached wrong; for then He is made a Savior by whom no man on earth could ever be saved, because man, dead in trespasses and sins, can do nothing of himself to come to Jesus. Thanks be to God that our Lord Jesus Christ has not only earned salvation for us, but has also made provision to impart His salvation to sinners. Do you ask: If there is no power and ability in me, how shall I come to possess His salvation? The prophet answers in these short words:

"Behold, thy King cometh unto thee." Why shouldst thou stop long to enquire: How shall I come to Him?

BEHOLD, HE COMES TO THEE.

Let me set forth:

- I. To whom He comes;
- II. In what sentiment He comes;
- III. How we should receive Him.

I.

Our text describes how the Lord, when coming to Jerusalem to suffer and to die, entered that city as a King in the midst of a multitude. The narrative is plain and well known, and I will not tarry long to repeat it. Riding on a despised animal, the multitude spreading their garments and olive twigs in the way, and the children crying: "*Hosanna to the Son of David*," so the Lord entered Jerusalem. Only this once in all His walk upon earth did the Lord assume the rôle of a king, and the reason why this was done the Evangelist tells plainly when writing: "*All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.*" All this was done to fulfill these words of the prophet Zechariah. These words are the centre of the whole text. Hence, with the prophet I cry out unto you: "*Behold, thy King cometh unto thee.*"

Unto whom does He come? "*Tell ye the daughter of Sion*," says the prophet. He comes to the daughter of Sion. Sion was the mount of God, where He had His dwelling place. The daughter of Sion, in the language of the Scripture, were those who worshiped on Mount Sion, pre-eminently those who worshiped there in spirit and in truth. The true daughter of Sion were those hungry and thirsty souls who, like Anna the prophetess, were waiting for the salvation of Israel to come out of Sion. To these hungry and thirsty souls the Lord came so that they were filled with rejoicing and began to sing: "*Hosanna in the highest.*" But not alone to those penitent souls who were waiting for His salvation did He come. He came to the whole

city; for at His entrance "all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?" He came even unto those traffickers in the temple; for He overthrew the tables of the money-changers and the seats of the dove-venders. He came unto the chief priests and scribes; for when they censured Him for accepting such praises from the children, He justified His action by the Scriptures. These two latter classes of people, indeed, the majority of Jerusalem's inhabitants, did not rejoice over His coming, yet He came unto them, and they have now no cloak for their sin. On the day of judgment the sentence will fall heavily upon their heads: "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." John 1, 11.

To the temple He came bodily, visibly; *now* He comes spiritually, invisibly. There He came to the nation of the Jews. To whom does He now come? He still comes to the daughter of Sion. In Mount Sion, where the temple once stood, the Lord is now no more worshiped. But there is still a daughter of Sion. Who this daughter of Sion is the Scriptures tell us distinctly. Thus we read in the second chapter of Isaiah: "Many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for out of Sion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." The daughter of Sion are those amongst all nations who learn the Law which went forth out of Sion, who cling to the Word coming forth from Jerusalem. Again we read in the 50th Psalm: "The Lord hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof. Out of Sion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined." The meaning is plain: on Sion the light of the world began to shine. That light is even now carried over the earth from the rising to the setting sun, and those are the daughter of Sion who are enlightened by this light. The daughter of Sion is the community of saints, the goodly company of those who truly believe in the Lord Jesus, who cling to Him as the Beloved of their soul and their most precious treasure. To these He comes, as He promised, saying: "If a man love me,

he will keep my words: and my father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." John 14, 23. The hearts of those that believe in Him, and therefore love Him, are His dwelling place to which He comes ever anew, His habitation, which He adorns with all the everlasting treasures won by His obedience unto the death of the cross. Indeed, the heart of a believer is His favorite dwelling place, dearer to Him than the seat of glory at His Father's right hand; for He departed from that seat of glory in order to gain the heart of man for a dwelling. He can not stay away from a believing heart. Behold, ye lovers of the Lord, your King comes unto your hearts.

And does He not come to any others? As He came to Jerusalem, came to many who received Him not, so He still comes to many who refuse to receive Him. Unto Jerusalem, He came riding on a beast despised by men; so He now comes riding on a chariot which is offensive to men, even the Word of the cross. Coming through His Word, He comes to all those to whom His Word is proclaimed. Among these are many like unto those money-changers and dove-venders in the temple who mind only the things belonging to this life; many like unto the chief priests and scribes who trust in themselves that they are righteous. Yet He comes to them seeking entrance into their hearts, desirous to make His abode with them. Because He comes through His Word I can cheerfully proclaim to you: Behold your King comes unto you; if you love His Word He comes to your hearts as to His cherished dwelling place; if thus far you have despised His Word, He comes to you to conquer your wayward heart and to prepare it to Himself for an habitation.

Behold a Stranger at thy door!
He gently knocks, has knocked before,
Has waited long, is waiting still;
Why dost thou treat a Friend so ill?

II.

But how does He come? Does He come so that we may welcome Him with gladness? Or does He come so that we

must be terrified at His coming? That He comes through His Word we have already heard, but in what mood does He come? What does He seek? What does He bring? Why does He come at all? All this the words of the prophet tell us: "*Thy King cometh unto thee, meek.*" The prophet says: He comes. He is not brought, but He comes. He is not led to you bound hand and foot so that perforce He must come, although He would not. He comes to you of His own free will and choice. There is no power in heaven or on earth that could force Him to come to you, if it were not His own will. Neither does He come, because you argued with Him, urged Him, and persuaded Him. He is not a hard man with whom it takes much pleading to persuade Him. He comes urged, persuaded, hastened on by His own compassion, love, grace and mercy. So St. Paul writes to Titus: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration." And He Himself said: "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring." John 10, 16. Before you asked Him, yea, when your tongue could not yet utter a word, He came to you in the washing of regeneration. Not because He stood in need of you, or because you urged Him, but He declares in the 43rd chapter of Isaiah: "Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices; but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities. I, even I, am he that blot-teth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." For His own sake He comes to you. His own desire to dwell in you is so strong that He is thereby obliged and compelled to come to you.

Here you have the answer to the question: How shall I come to Jesus? He comes to you. You cannot come to Him, but He comes to you. Without Him you can do nothing, and begin nothing, and what you begin without Him is all sin. He must first come to you; He must lay the first stone in you. Of yourself you can not even with sincere longing desire Him to come to you; for if you desire Him He has already come to you

and has created that desire in you, as David says in the 21st Psalm: "Thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness." Therefore Luther truly says in a sermon on this text: "Learn from this Gospel, how it comes to pass when God begins to make us pious, and what is the beginning to become pious. There is no other beginning, than that thy King come unto thee and begin in thee." So Luther, and what he says here is most assuredly true. There is no other beginning to become pious, than when this King comes to us and begins in us. We do not make the beginning by cutting away the brush and clearing the way for Him, or by casting out the enmity against God, by putting away the heart of stone and overcoming malicious resistance. If we could thus commence conversion, why should we not also continue it? But "it is God," says St. Paul, "which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Phil. 2, 13. And what is His good pleasure? To come to us, to clear the way, to break the will of the devil, the world and the flesh in us, to take away the heart of stone and thus to prepare in us an habitation unto Himself. O a glorious truth! We must not come to Him, He comes to us. Suppose it were the contrary; suppose He would not come to you, but you must come to Him, what then? Why, all your lifetime you would be obliged to inquire anxiously: What shall I do to come to Jesus, only to find that you can do nothing. But blessed thou; for "*behold, thy King cometh unto thee.*"

Do you ask: What then am I to make of all those Scripture passages which command me to come to Jesus? Does not He Himself say: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden?" So He does say, and glorious words they are. But you must not overlook two facts: In the first place, He does not say: you can come, He only says: "Come unto me." The command to do a thing does not necessarily include that we are able to do it. In the second place, you should remember, when *He* calls, then men come, yet not because they are able to, but because He calls them. He is the almighty God who does impossible things. He called when there was nothing,—and heaven and earth sprang into existence. To our understanding

an impossible thing. He called the light and it shone forth out of darkness. He calls the dead and they come. He called Lazarus, and he came out of the sepulchre, not because he was able to, but because the Lord called him. He comes and calls men through His Word, and they that sleep awake, rise up, and come to Him. It is all of Him; the Word is of Him, the calling of Him, the awakening, the rising, the coming, all of Him. O thou, my fellow Christian, who desirest Him, needest not harass thy soul how to come to Him. "*Behold, thy King cometh unto thee.*" And you that have Him not with you, you money-changers who love only the things of this world, you self-righteous who think yourselves good enough without Him, you have no excuse; for He surely comes to you to make His abode with you, but you bid Him go hence. Surely, your soul will be left desolate.

"*Behold, thy King cometh unto thee.*" He comes as a King. What kind of a King is He? He is King of the universe, but as such He is not spoken of here. He is the King of Sion, and as such He comes unto thee, "*meek,*" kind, good. He does not come as a king of wrath and vengeance, He comes as the King of mercy. "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved." John 3, 17. Neither does He come like other kings who come to their subjects to exact and to take from them; this King comes to bring and to give. What has He to give? Is He a rich King? Yea, He is rich. He has grace, He has righteousness, He has the Holy Ghost, He has peace with God, He has light, He has life, He has salvation. He is a rich King. He labored hard, He sweated blood to win treasures and He won great riches. And His delight is not in possessing, but in giving away His riches, and therefore He comes unto you to bring you all these things.

I have said that He does not come to you because He is in need of you, and that is true; for He is rich and stands in need of nothing. I hope you will not regard it a contradiction when I now say, He comes to you because He needs you. Why does He need you? O, He needs sinners to make them right-

eous. He needs the dead to make them alive, He needs the blind to make them seeing, He needs the sick to make them whole, He needs the sad to make them glad, He needs the condemned to save them. Because He delights in bestowing His riches on others, therefore He needs you and comes to you to adorn you with His treasures. And O with what rejoicing does He fill the empty soul with His riches! He is like unto that father receiving his lost son: shoes must cover the feet, a ring must adorn the hand, a chain must encircle the neck, a fatted calf must be brought to the table. If there is rejoicing before the angels of heaven when a sinner repents, much more does this King rejoice in making the poor rich. "*Behold, thy King cometh unto thee*"; receive thou Him and sing:

Welcome, King of glory, now!
Hail! my Savior, Lord art Thou.
Here too, in my heart I pray,
O prepare Thyself a way.

III.

How should we receive Him? Do you say: How shall I worthily prepare the house for the King of Sion? Are you afraid that He will not find things with you as they ought to be? Did I not tell you a moment ago, that He comes to prepare for Himself a dwelling in you? Of course He will not find things with you as they ought to be, otherwise you would not need Him at all. Because you are soiled and ragged, He comes to cleanse and to clothe you. Do but pronounce Him welcome, then all is well.

Or if you are still anxious to know how to receive Him, let me tell you. When the prophet here says: "*Thy King cometh unto thee*," make out of the "thy" a "my" and out of the "thee" a "me" and say: "My King cometh unto me." Does it startle you that you should be so bold? Here you are to be bold. Paul was a great sinner, yet of this King he boldly said: "Who loved me and gave himself for me." Gal. 2, 20. He is *thy* King who bought thee and comes to thee in the Gospel. Hold thou Him. Do like Jacob did on the banks of Jordan

when wrestling with this King; for when the King said: "Let me go," Jacob answered: "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Gen. 32, 26. That is the right kind of reception; grasp Him, saying: Here Thou art and here Thou shalt abide; for Thou art my King and I will not let Thee go, mine Thou shalt remain.

If you thus receive Him as your King then you will be ready to do as the multitude in our text did. You will be ready to take your garments, that is, whatever you possess in this world, and laying them under the feet of Jesus you will say: These things I possess as though I possessed them not, but Jesus is mine, mine forever; He is my wisdom, He is my righteousness, He my salvation. And if He is thus become your one and all, your heart will join in with the multitude entering Jerusalem and will sing: "*Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.*" Amen.

II. SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

TEXT: And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh. And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my words shall not pass away. And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man. Luke 21, 25-36.

The advent, or the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ into the world, is threefold. His first advent was His incarnation, when He came into the flesh to redeem the world by His suffering and death. In this manner He will come no more. After He was once offered on the cross He will not be sacrificed again, because entering in once into the holy place by His own blood, He obtained eternal redemption for us. His second coming is His spiritual coming to the hearts of men through His Word and the holy sacraments. Through the Word of the Gospel and the holy sacraments He comes to us, knocking at the door of our hearts and offering us grace, pardon, righteousness and eternal life in His blood shed for the remission of sin, as He commanded John to write to the church of the Laodiceans: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him and he with me." Rev.

3, 20. His third advent is yet future; it will take place when He comes to judge the quick and the dead, and to consummate all things.

His first coming was done in poverty and great lowliness; for He was born in a stable and was laid in a manger. His last coming will be done in majesty and great glory. The snows of the north and the burning sands of the south will yield up their dead, and all nations will be gathered before Him. On that day all things will be made right. They that loved and honored Him will receive the kingdom, and the despisers will be banished from His countenance forever; for He is just and will judge righteously.

When is He coming? On what day and date will resound the trump that wakes the dead? Time and again presumptuous men have fixed the day and the date of the Lord's coming, only to find themselves deluded. It is a vain and idle, yea, even a presumptuous undertaking for men to name the day and the date of the judgment; for what God has kept hidden no man can search out. Of the day appointed for the judgment the Lord said: "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." Mark 13, 32. What the angels of heaven cannot cipher out, what Jesus Christ Himself in the state of His humiliation did not know, no man should attempt to unravel.

Christ tells us the object of God in hiding the date of the judgment, when adding to the words already quoted: "Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is." To inspirit our hearts unto watchfulness and prayer let me speak to you:

ON THE COMING OF CHRIST UNTO JUDGMENT.

- I. He comes without delay surely;
- II. He comes to the unbelieving terribly;
- III. He comes to the believers comfortingly.

I.

We live in those times of which the apostle Peter prophesied when writing: "There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the prom-

ise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." 2 Pet. 3, 4. These scoffers have now come in multitudes, ridiculing the prophecy of a judgment day, and denying the very existence of God. But they are "willingly ignorant," as Peter says; for there is a voice in the bosom of man, which convinces him that there is a day coming in the which he will be made responsible for the deeds done in his body, a day when every one shall reap what he has sown. Peter therefore gives this answer to the mockings of these scoffers: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." The fact that the Lord *has* not yet come to judgment is not a proof that He *will* not come, but a proof that He is a gracious Lord, granting men time for repentance.

The certainty of the Lord's coming to judgment is attested by the Scriptures in manifold ways. Here the Lord mentions a number of signs which precede and presage His coming: "*And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.*" And after mentioning these signs He distinctly says: "*And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.*" What the signs in sun, moon and stars are the Lord tells us in Matthew 24, saying: "The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken."

Have these signs been fulfilled already, or is their fulfillment yet to come? This question is of paramount importance, because these things must precede the judgment and if they have not yet come to pass we can not yet expect the Lord's coming. There are two things which we should here bear in mind. In the first place, the Scriptures exhort us to hold our-

selves in readiness always to appear before the Son of man, even as the Lord says at the end of this Gospel: "*Watch ye therefore, and pray always.*" If we are to be ready *every* day to appear before the judgment seat of Christ, we may be called on to do so *any* day. In the second place, we must bear in mind that the Lord is here speaking of signs which were to come to pass before the last day, certifying that the end of the world and the day of judgment will once come, and these signs must be of such a character that the great mass of mankind do not regard them signs, neither believe that they foreshadow the judgment; for, according to the Scriptures, men will live securely, as they did in the days of Noah, when the Son of man will come. Whilst men are scoffing the prophecy and disregarding the signs, that day is to come upon them "*as a snare.*"

Such things which men do not count signs of the Lord's coming are eclipses of the sun and moon, the disappearance of stars from the firmament, great storms, earthquakes and the like. Many smile scornfully, when these things are pronounced signs of the coming judgment. They say, how can a thing which is brought about by natural causes be a sign that the Lord will come to judgment? But why should it not? The rainbow is also produced by natural causes; yet God appointed it a sign that the earth should no more be destroyed by a deluge, and this sign has proved true unto the present day. Christ has appointed these natural things for signs of His coming. Certainly, if the darkening of the sun is to be a sign, it must be a temporary darkening which lasts for a short time only; if the falling of the stars is to be a sign, it is evident that the falling of a few stars only is meant; for when the sun is extinguished to shine no more, when all the stars fall from the heavens, then the last day is come, and there will be no more room for signs presaging it. Other passages of the Scriptures compared, it becomes very evident that the Lord is here not speaking of miracles, but of things which can be explained in a natural way and which men generally do not accept for signs, otherwise the day of the Lord could not come

upon them "*as a snare.*" Let the scoffers scoff. Often must they themselves bear witness that these very things are really signs of the coming end; for when these things do come to pass, when the storm winds unfold their strength, or the solid ground begins to quake under their feet, then are those same scoffers filled with terror, lest the day of judgment have come.

All these signs have been fulfilled time and again, and their manifold repetition assures us that the coming of the Lord is nigh at hand. Few, indeed, regard these signs, and these few are derided by the world as superstitious people, but the last of all signs will be the sign of the Son of man. There, in the clouds, it will appear, and that sign no one shall ridicule; for all shall see it and every one shall know what it means.

That the signs shall not fail, but that the coming of the Lord will surely follow them, this the Lord here illustrates by a comparison: "*Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.*" Infallibly as summer follows after the budding of the trees, so infallibly will the Lord's coming follow after the preceding signs. The Lord confirms it with a solemn assertion, saying: "*Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.*" The Jews have been scattered among the nations of the earth since eighteen hundred years, yet they have preserved their characteristics as a people. They are to-day the same stiff-necked generation as in the days of Christ, and every Jew we meet at this late day and in this far western land is a living testimony of the truth of the Lord's Word and the certainty of His coming to judgment.

The signs are fulfilled, the Lord has promised it, and His Word will not pass away, He will come. The day is appointed in the council of God, and, whether it be to-morrow, or centuries hence, come He will, and *He will come to the unbelieving terribly.*

II.

Of that day the Lord says: "*And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.*" As a bird, when suspecting no danger, is suddenly caught in a snare, so will the inhabitants of the earth be surprised suddenly by the coming of the Son of man. "As in the days that were before the flood," says the Lord, "they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away: so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." This is the reason why the day of judgment will come upon the inhabitants of the earth as a snare, because they are not expecting it, but live securely, saying like that evil servant: "My Lord delayeth his coming." Following their usual pursuits and apprehending no danger, yea rather saying, there were no last day, or it would not come in a thousand years, the nations will suddenly behold the sign of the Son of man. Especially three vices does the Lord mention in our text as being prevalent at His coming: "*Surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life.*" The Lord describes the generation of the last days as delighting in eating and drinking, as having their whole hearts in the cares, pleasures and treasures of this world, like the Sodomites even in the morning of the selfsame day in which their city was destroyed. Plainly a description of the world as it now is. Our age is marked by material progress and prosperity as none other in the world's history. This is right and good in itself, but, because man is by nature inclined to be earthly minded, material progress and prosperity have the tendency to draw the heart and mind more to the earth and earthly things. What does the world now want? It wants peace, ease, new conveniences and new enjoyments, and many unblushingly say, men had been hoaxed long enough with the hope of a heaven in the hereafter, they wanted their heaven on this earth. And where are those who are waiting and watch-

ing for the Lord's coming? Are they not a paltry few as compared with the host of the earthly minded?

But the greater the imaginary security, the more dreadful the waking. What consternation will seize upon the wicked when the flames of the burning elements will suddenly envelop them, as the waters of the flood came upon the inhabitants of the first world. Must they not be filled with terror like a bird finding itself caught in the meshes of a net? When God spake the ten words from the top of mount Sinai, the children of Israel could not bear it. They fled, fearing that they must die. How much more will the unbelieving be terrified at the sound of the trump of God, summoning them to the judgment! When the Lamb opened the sixth seal, John saw in a vision that "the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" Rev. 6, 15.

Why will the unbelieving strive to flee from that day of wrath like a bird struggles to free itself from a snare? Because their own conscience pronounces their sentence beforehand. Here on earth a criminal may hope to escape by denial, or bribery, or flight, but in that judgment none will escape. That Judge will not be deceived; for His eyes penetrate the very bowels of the earth, seeing what is done in secret. He will not be bribed; for He is just and will render unto every man according to his works. He will not be resisted; for He is almighty and has power to destroy both body and soul in hell. How will the fornicator be overwhelmed with shame when his deeds done under cover of darkness will be brought to light! How will the miser tremble when he is judged as an idolater! How will the spiteful quake when they are pronounced murderers! Then will the scoffer cease scoffing, when he will see the Same whom he denied "*coming in a cloud with power and great glory.*"

When once the apostle Paul before Felix, the governor, "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come," Felix began to tremble. How shall the ungodly tremble when the Judge will descend and in thunder-tones will speak to their conscience: I am Jesus who once came to purchase you with my own blood, but whose love ye despised and whose Word ye rejected, and now I am come in flaming fire to take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel. Woe, woe will be unto them that will not be found worthy to stand before the Son of man.

Their sighs are unavailing,
The day of grace is past and gone,
They trembling stand before His throne,
All unprepared to meet Him.

Jesus Christ, the ordained Judge of the world, will come without delay surely; He will come to the unbelieving terribly, but *He will come to the believers comfortingly.*

III.

Whilst consternation and despair will fill the hearts of the unbelieving at the Lord's coming, rejoicing and gladness will be with the believers. "*And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.*" Who can "look up and lift up his head," who can be bold and rejoice greatly, when all the world must despair, when the heavens will be rolled up like a scroll and the elements will melt with fervent heat? These words the Lord addresses to those who believe in Him, who love Him, and who long to be with Him. Whosoever loves the world, or anything in the world more than Jesus, can not rejoice, he must sorrow at the loss of his heart's treasure; but those who love the Lord more than aught else, whose dearest treasure Jesus is, will rejoice with exceeding great joy, when they will see Him coming who is the joy of their hearts and the desire of their souls. Quick as thought will the believers be transformed and the sleeping saints will start forth out of their graves, their bodies glorified and together, a glorious, shining throng, they will be

caught up to meet the Lord in the air. That will be the day of the church's triumph, when the children of God, separated from the wicked and hypocrites, will rise upward with a shout saying: Come is the day of our redemption, that glorious day which we loved, unto which we hasted, and for which we longed.

To rejoice over His coming we must have faith and trust in Him. Therefore we should daily inquire of ourselves: Heart, where is thy love? Is it in the world, or is it with the Lord? Where is thy treasure? Is it on earth beneath, or in heaven above? Wouldst thou flee if to-day thou shouldst see the Lord coming in the cloud? We daily pray in the Lord's prayer: "Thy kingdom come." Is it truly our desire that the kingdom of glory should come, or does our heart gainsay what our lips pray? The man who does not desire the Lord's coming, who does not, as St. Paul says, "love his appearing," is none of His. I do not say that no one is a Christian who experiences a feeling of dread when picturing to his mind the terrors of the last day; for ye know that there are two things in the Christian, the flesh which dreads, and the spirit which loves the Lord's appearing. But by the Spirit the Christian crucifies the flesh, and beholding the signs foretelling that the Lord is nigh, he "*looks up and lifts up his head.*"

With these words the Lord aims to cheer up those of His followers who are depressed in spirit and weary in their pilgrimage. He bids them take courage anew whenever they see a sign presaging His coming, and He consoles them with the word "redemption." From what will His children be redeemed by His coming? They will be redeemed from "the body of this death." In this life the Christian must often sigh with St. Paul: "I find that, when I would do good, evil is present with me," Rom. 7, 21, but when the Lord comes, then will "the law of sin" be purged out of our members; for to the Corinthians St. Paul writes: "The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." 1 Cor. 15, 52. If delivered from the body of sin, then also from all the evils which sin has brought upon us, a glory which we can now conceive of but darkly. Must we

then not rejoice when beholding signs which show that our "*redemption draweth nigh*"? Does not a weary traveler rejoice when he sees signs that he is nearing home? What else are the followers of Jesus Christ than pilgrims in this world? Their citizenship is not here, they "look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." On the journey they are exposed to the hardships of the way and the inclemencies of the seasons, but the Lord's coming shall end this pilgrimage. Then shall they come to the city which they seek; then shall they enter the rest which the Lord has prepared for them by His suffering and death. Ought not these weary pilgrims take courage anew as often as they see signs come to pass, telling them that the day is drawing nigh which will end their toilsome and dangerous pilgrimage and will bring them to their eternal home?

O ye weary souls, that are "chastened every morning!" Look up; lift up your heads. The trees have budded; the frosty winter is well nigh ended; summer is at hand; the signs are fulfilled; your Savior must soon come to lay low the heads of the haughty; to destroy this earth so full of sin and woe, and to create the new heavens and the new earth. He comes to deliver you from all evil.

Blessed, blessed every one who will be accounted worthy to stand before the Son of man. And worthy to stand before Him every one will be found, who appeals to the sufferings and death of Jesus of Nazareth as the atonement for his sins, and who says: I am a miserable creature, sold under sin. Not for a single day can I refrain my heart from evil; but my Lord has bled and died for my sins and has put them away; and He will come again to deliver me out of this evil and perverse world and to receive me unto Himself.

In this faith, my beloved fellow pilgrims, faint not. Yet "*watch ye, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.*" Watch, that ye err not from the faith; watch, that ye be not enticed into by-paths. Press on in the narrow way, praying: Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

III. SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

TEXT: Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me. And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet: For this is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Matt. 11, 2-10.

All our faith, all our consolation and all our hope rest on the fact that the Son of God was made flesh to establish a tabernacle of God with men, and that Jesus Christ born in Bethlehem, educated in Nazareth and crucified on Calvary, is the promised Seed of woman, the Salvation of Israel out of Zion. On the certainty of these two facts rests all our hope of salvation; for if the Son of God had not been made flesh, we would yet be in our sins; and if Jesus Christ were not He that was promised to the patriarchs, we would be deluded people. Were it not true what Christ Himself testified: "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father," John 16, 28, were this not true, then we would be without hope in the world. But, thanks be to God, the fact that Jesus Christ is in deed and in truth the promised One, is established beyond a doubt. The history of His birth, life, suffering, death and resurrection; His miracles, His doctrine and the fulfillment of all the prophecies of the Old Testament in Him, prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that He is Jehovah, our righteousness, the

root of Jesse, the glory of Israel and the light of the Gentiles. He is the One; for He is "declared to be the Son of God with power," Rom. 1, 4, and "all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen." 2 Cor. 1, 20.

What the fathers most desired,
 What the prophets' heart inspired,
 What they longed for many a year,
 Stands fulfilled in glory here-

Permit me to-day briefly to set forth:

THAT CHRIST IS INDEED THE PROMISED MESSIAH.

This He proves in our Gospel

- I. By His miracles;
- II. By the Scriptures of the Old Testament.

I.

The object of this Gospel, as well as of that for the following Sunday, is, to demonstrate that He who came to the daughter of Zion, conducted into the city of Jerusalem by a multitude of people with singing and shouting, is truly the Savior sent by God, the Same who will come to judge the world.

But before speaking of this we must take notice of an item in our text, which might appear very strange to some and which infidels sometimes abuse to make it an argument against the Bible. It is the question of John the Baptist: "*Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?*" Should John not have known that Jesus was the promised Messiah, or should he, perhaps during his imprisonment, have fallen into doubt? Neither the one nor the other can be assumed. It is, of course, true that the greatest saints of God may fall into doubt and sin, yea even into idolatry, for which Solomon is an example who, in his old age, was seduced by his heathenish wives to build altars to idols. It is not to be denied that John the Baptist might have fallen into doubt, but that he did not is indicated plainly enough in the Scriptures. John had seen the Holy Ghost descend in the form of a dove and remain on

Jesus; unequivocally he testified: "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world;" again and again did he "bare record that this is the Son of God." John 1, 34. Moreover, he rebuked king Herod because of Herodias, his brother's wife, saying: "it is not lawful for thee to have her," Matt. 14, 4, and in this testimony John remained steadfast, although it cost him his life. He was not a wavering man, as the Lord here says to the multitude concerning him: "*What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?*" Here the Lord plainly says, that John was not like a reed swaying to and fro in the wind, and as he was steadfast in his confession we must conclude that he was steadfast in his faith.

But though John himself was not in doubt as to whether Jesus was the Messiah, yet the disciples of John were. When John was in prison and the fame of Jesus began to spread abroad, the disciples of John, being anxious to know if Jesus was truly the One promised, reported His deeds to their master. In order, therefore, that they might become fully convinced, John sent them to Jesus with this question; for John well knew that the Lord had more testimonies for His identity, than only the testimony of His precursor. Not for his own sake, but for their sake did John send his disciples to put this question to the Lord. This is also indicated by the form of the question; for John does not send them to ask: "Do I," but: "*Do we look for another?*" So John's disciples came and proposed this question to the Lord, and incontrovertibly does He prove to them that He and none other is the Messiah.

He answered: "*Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.*" When the disciples of John came to Jesus, they did not find Him alone, but in the midst of a great multitude of people, surrounded by sick and ailing ones. There they proposed their question to Him, but He did not simply answer: I am Christ, neither did He appeal to the testimony of John, but He first

of all appealed to His works. The Lord does not require them simply to believe His word; for then they might have answered as the Pharisees once did: "Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true;" John 8, 13; but as He answered the Jews: "Though ye believe not me, believe the works," so here. The Lord answered them in a twofold manner: first in deeds and then in words. St. Luke, after stating the question put by John's disciples, writes: "And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities, and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight," Luke 7, 21, and then St. Luke subjoins the answer of Christ. When the messengers of John had proposed their question to Christ, He first answered by deeds, performing a number of miracles before them, and then He appealed to these miracles which they had seen with their own eyes.

How do the miracles of Christ prove Him the Son of God and the promised Deliverer, since many others have also performed miracles? When a miracle is performed, when the ordinary course of nature is changed simply by a word, either God must Himself be present in His own person, or the act must be performed in the name and power of God; for no creature, not even an angel, can, without using adequate means, change the course of nature appointed by God. Now prophets and apostles did perform miracles: Moses struck the rock with his staff and water flowed from it; Elijah prayed and fire fell from heaven; Peter commanded a lame man sitting at the entrance of the temple to rise and walk, and he arose and walked; but only and alone in the name of the Lord did the prophets and apostles perform these works, and they never performed miracles by their own power. Their miracles, therefore, prove nothing more than that the power of God was with them, that they were sent by God, and that their word was the Word of God. But Jesus Christ performed miracles in a far different manner. He did them in His own name and by His own power. When once a leper said unto Him: "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean;" He did not answer: In the name of the Lord be thou cleansed, but He said: "I

will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed." Matt. 8, 3. The miracles of Christ, therefore, prove more than only that the power of God is with Him and that His Word is of God; they prove that He Himself is God; for He that can change the course of nature simply by a word spoken in His own name must be God, who alone has such power. Christ must be true God, because He performed miracles in His own name and by His own power. And He performed a countless number of miracles. As we read in the Gospels He performed miracles at all places wherever He went, and yet St. John writes: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book." John 20, 30.

Christ's miracles prove that He is the Son of God who is come into the world a Savior; for in them all He wrought deliverance from some evil. Requested to give proof that He is the One which was to come, He appeals to His works; and well may He; for these certainly do prove to an evidence that He is Jehovah, our Savior.

II.

After the Lord had answered the disciples of John in deeds, proving Himself the almighty God, He also answered them in words, proving that He is the One spoken of by the prophets; for He answered them in words written by the prophets long ago, thus showing that these were fulfilled in Him. The prophet Isaiah, ch. 35, had written: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing." And the same prophet had said: "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise." 26, 19. By thus answering them in words of the prophets Christ meant to tell the disciples of John: Ye know, according to the prophets, the Messiah is to perform such miracles, and now with your eyes ye do see me perform these works.

Next to His works, He appeals to the doctrine which He was

preaching: "*The poor have the gospel preached to them.*" This too had been foretold by the prophets, that the Messiah would preach the Gospel, glad tidings to the poor, as the Anointed of the Lord spake by the mouth of Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." ch. 61. When Jesus once read these words publicly in the synagogue at Nazareth, He began His explanation with the words: "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." Luke 4, 21. Of the same the Lord reminded the messengers of John that in that very hour this prophecy was fulfilled in their ears; for when they came to Him, He was preaching to the multitude, and not the rich and the proud, but the poor, the humble and the lowly were gathered about Him. To these He proclaimed the glad tidings, that the kingdom of God was at hand, and the heavens were now opened. Ye know, those sighing in the bondage of sin, the publicans and sinners, flocked to Him, and to these He proclaimed deliverance from their burden, the gracious forgiveness of their sins. Here again the Lord tells the disciples of John: Ye know, according to the prophets, the Messiah is to preach the Gospel to the poor; ye see here a multitude of poor gathered around me, and ye do hear me proclaim to them the acceptable year of the Lord; "*go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see,*" and be ye believing and not unbelieving.

Of one more prophecy of the Scriptures did the Lord remind them, saying: "*And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.*" Thus we read in the 118th Psalm: "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner." In the 4th chapter of Acts Peter quotes these words as having been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, saying to the high council: "Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, this is the stone which was set at naught of you builders, which became the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in

any other." But most clearly did Isaiah foretell that many would be offended in the Messiah. In the 53d chapter he says: "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised and we esteemed him not." And more directly in the 8th chapter: "He shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken." This prophecy was repeated by Simeon in the temple. Taking the child Jesus up in his arms, he said unto His mother: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against." Jesus Christ was sent for the salvation of Israel, but it was foretold that He would be a stone of stumbling to many, His own people would despise Him, and the rulers in Israel would reject Him.

All this began to be fulfilled while John the Baptist was yet living. No sooner did Christ commence to preach and perform miracles than the builders, the priests and scribes, rejected Him, and many of the people took offense in Him, and this, too, the disciples of John saw and heard, this prophecy also was being fulfilled in Him.

In very deed the Lord gives to these men a thorough answer; He proves to them beyond a question that He is the Messiah, and at the same time He earnestly warns them not to be offended in Him, not to make light of His testimony, but to acknowledge and to receive Him for their Saviour. Thereupon the Lord dismissed them; for now they could make no other conclusion than this: He that performs the works and preaches the doctrine which the prophets foretold of the Messiah must be the Hope of Israel; Jesus of Nazareth does these works and preaches this doctrine; therefore there can be no doubt that He is the promised One.

When the disciples of John had departed, the Lord proposed one more convincing proof to the people that He is the Messiah. He began to speak of John the Baptist, and con-

cerning him. He says at the end of our text: "*Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.*" This prophecy was recorded by Malachi, the last of the prophets, and it plainly foretold that one would come who would prepare the hearts of the people for the reception of the Messiah, and here the Lord declares that this prophecy was fulfilled in John. From the whole office of John it is evident that he was sent to be a way-preparer; for he preached repentance unto the forgiveness of sins, and continually pointed to Christ declaring Him the Redeemer and Savior of the world. For this reason he was more than a prophet. The prophets could only say: He will come; but John could say: He standeth among you. John could point to Him with the finger, saying: This is He. How unmistakably this prophecy was fulfilled in John is evident from the words following those here quoted by the Lord; for Malachi continues: "And the Lord whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts." John came first, but Christ followed immediately after, and as John decreased, Christ increased.

Let me impress this upon your minds that the Lord here in our Gospel does not only testify that He is the promised Messiah, He proves it with such evidence which neither man nor angel can refute. It is clear as day, He is the One. No one, therefore, has any just reason not to accept Him for the Messiah and Savior. But alas! even unto this day it is with the great multitude of people as the Lord says of the Jews shortly after our text: "John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners." The great mass of people always find something in Christ to which they object. They want to, and will find some reason to stand aloof from Him. Some take exception to one thing, some to another. The proud take exception to His humility, the rich to His poverty.

Those wise in their own conceit are offended at the simplicity of His Gospel, to the selfrighteous His doctrine of grace is a stone of stumbling, and the lovers of sin hate His instruction.

It is a sight which fills the heart of every lover of the Lord with sadness, that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is offensive to the world at large; that the good seed finds a good soil only with a very small remnant; but even this sorrowful observation should serve to confirm our hearts in the faith of the Gospel. The fact that the Gospel is so repugnant to the natural man and yet marches in triumph over the face of the earth, conquering a heart here and a company of souls there, is a proof that it is a Word of divine power given unto us from heaven. But this same truth should teach us to look well to ourselves and to watch lest our own hearts be offended in Christ, seeing we also have the flesh to contend with.

Unto us the light of revelation shines more fully than it did even unto John, wherefore the Lord says: "*He that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he,*" because a well informed Christian has a clearer knowledge of Christ and His work, than men could have before His work was finished. And since He has revealed unto us the fulness of His grace, let us not reject Him; let us not close our hearts against Him that He cannot make His abode with us. Of the Jews the Lord testified: "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin; but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father." John 15, 24. If the Jews had not had the unquestionable evidence that He was the promised One, they would not have had the terrible sin of knowingly and maliciously rejecting Him. We are placed in a similar situation. We know that Jesus of Nazareth is the One that was to come; we know that He is come into the world to save sinners, and, knowing this, let us see that He may not say unto us in the day of judgment: Ye knew that I had come to save you, but ye would not.

Remember well His peculiar word of promise when He says: "*BLESSED is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.*" Yea verily, is that man blessed who is not offended in Christ, who

receives Him with joy and abides in Him alway. He is blessed in his faith, because in Christ he has the propitiation for sin, and peace with God; blessed in his life, because sin cannot rule over him, but in the power of Christ he gains victory on victory over the flesh; blessed in his afflictions, because the Father is conforming him to the image of His Son; blessed in his death, because by it he enters in to a better life; blessed in the grave, because he is asleep in Jesus; blessed in his resurrection, because he will rise to meet the Lord in the air.

Consider the immutable foundation on which our Christian faith rests. Our Redeemer is the Lord of heaven; His works prove Him such; His doctrine nourishes the soul with imperishable hope; in Him the prophecies of old are yea and amen. O let us cleave unto Him and not turn from Him, but say with Simon Peter: "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." Amen.

IV. SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

TEXT: And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias. And they which were sent were of the Pharisees. And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet? John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; he it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.—John 1, 19-28.

The children of the world mould their opinions with regard to religion according to the spirit of the times. They shape their religious beliefs after the views which are most fashionable and popular in their time and country, and, when new opinions come into vogue, they are ready to adopt and to praise them. They are like the weather-cock, turning with the wind of popularity and fashionableness, and many professing Christians are controlled by the same spirit. They are always ready to adopt the ideas, ways, and practices which take best with the mass of the people, and they do not want such teachings and practices which are hated and denounced by the world. Even among preachers, those are found who advocate the principle that religion should progress and change with the times. They say, if one thing does no more draw, it should be dropped, and if a new thing comes up which does take with the masses, it should be adopted.

But those three men at Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, were not of this mind. When king Nebuchadnezzar

set up a new idol and at his command the princes and the mighty men of his kingdom fell down to worship this new god, these three men would not bow to it or worship it. And though they saw that all the great and the noble did it, yet they did not accommodate themselves to the multitude, neither did they yield when they were bound hand and foot to be cast into the fiery furnace. On that great festive occasion, the dedication of this new idol, the noblest and mightiest from a score of nations were assembled, and they were all weather-cocks turned by the wind of royal favor, eager to please the king by bowing to a new god, and only these three men were so "selfish and stubborn" that they would not do as the others did. Did not that multitude have reason to think those three selfish men deserved death, because they were so stubborn as to refuse to do like all the others did?

Yet it was neither selfishness nor stubbornness with those three; they only showed themselves faithful to the true religion. Every true Christian, who has come to a lively knowledge of divine truth and right, cannot swim with the stream of popularity and fashionableness; he must abide by the Word of the Lord, or he will cease to be a Christian. DEAD FISH DRIFT DOWN STREAM WITH THE CURRENT, LIVE FISH SWIM AGAINST THE CURRENT.

Saving faith is a living power and it will not allow the tongue to remain silent, it will prompt unto confession with the mouth. When Peter and John were commanded by the high priest "not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus," they answered: "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." Acts 4, 20. Though the prospect of a violent death was presented to them, yet those apostles could not but confess Jesus before men. And why not? Simply because the fire of faith was within their hearts. A soldier who will not confess himself to the flag to which he has sworn, and will not fight for it, is not a faithful soldier, but a traitor; and whosoever would be Christ's, but will not confess Him before men, will, when the hidden things of darkness are brought to light, be found as one who sought the honor of men more than the

honor of God. To awaken our hearts unto boldness in confessing Christ let me to-day speak of:

JOHN THE BAPTIST, A FAITHFUL AND A FEARLESS CONFESSOR.

Let us consider:

- I. The occasion for his confession;
- II. His confession of himself;
- III. His defense.

I.

The life of John the Baptist was a very extraordinary one. When he was born both his parents were old, and well stricken in years. The child's birth was announced by an angel to his father Zacharias whilst he was executing the priestly office in the temple, and for a sign of the truth of his message the angel said unto Zacharias: "Behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak until the day that these things shall be performed." Luke 1, 20. Before John was born he was filled with the Holy Ghost, and on the day of his circumcision his father suddenly received his speech again.

Extraordinary was also John's manner of life. "He was in the deserts" where he dressed in raiment of camels' hair, and ate locusts and wild honey. When the time had come in which he was to exercise his office of making "ready a people prepared for the Lord," he came to Jordan, "preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." Mark 1, 4. No man had preached so powerfully in Israel as John did since the days of the old prophets. Therefore his words created a commotion throughout the whole land, and thousands flocked to him to be baptized of him. This drew the attention of the high council at Jerusalem to John. This council was the highest ecclesiastical authority in the land, and its duty was to watch over the temple and the true worship of God, and to see that no new heretical doctrines and practices were introduced. Now the preaching of John was something new and baptizing with water something unheard of; so the council resolved to send a delegation of priests and Levites to John to make in-

quiry of him, as to who and what he was, and by what authority he introduced these new things. This action of the members of the high council would have been right and good, if only the motive and object had been right. They, however, did it not from zeal for the honor and the true worship of God, but rather to promote their own selfish ends. But whatever the motives of those high-standing men may have been, it was certainly not a mean delegation which they sent. This embassy was composed of men occupying a high rank in society and they were backed by the highest authority. Before this august and powerful embassy John *"confessed, and denied not, but confessed."* Be it emperor or king, pope or bishop; be it father or mother, sister or brother, whenever it is required, the Christian is, as St. Peter writes, to "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh him a reason of the hope that is in him." 1 Pet. 3, 15. Wherever and whenever it is required, a Christian is to confess Christ. This is a plain duty and I will at present not enlarge on it.

II.

The first question put to John by the embassy was: "*Who art thou?*" This question obliged John to give testimony concerning himself. If John had not known it before, this question would have obliged him to look to himself, asking: Who art thou? Knowledge must precede confession. No one can confess that of which he knows nothing. We must first know ourselves before we can give testimony of ourselves, and we must first know Christ before we can confess Him. Commonly people look to others and inquisitively ask: Who is this man? or what is that woman? Far more important is it to ask one's own self: Who art thou? "Let every man prove his own work," says the apostle. To know one's own self that is beneficial. Let him that would make a confession look to himself and ask: Who art thou? Dost thou know what a Christian must confess? Dost thou know and hold the pure truth of the Gospel of Christ? Art thou sure that what thou confessest is the truth of God and not thine opinion only? Let him that

would make a confession look to himself and ask: Who art thou? Art thou prepared to make a *faithful* confession? Who art thou in thy faith? Dost thou know and hold Jesus and His salvation? Who art thou in thy life and conversation? Dost thou "walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing," or like unto those of whom Paul wrote with "weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ"? Phil. 3, 18. To be true and faithful confessors we must know that the doctrine which we confess is not human opinion, but God's truth, and this truth we must believe in all sincerity of heart and must walk agreeably to it.

John the Baptist did know who and what he was. Without hesitating he answered straightway: "*I am not the Christ.*" The question was put in such a form that he might have answered in many words, but he understood that they wanted to know whether he claimed to be the Messiah, and he answered straightforward: No. He did not seek evasions and equivocations, they did not need to ask him twice, his answer was to the point. They ask further: "*What then? Art thou Elias?* And he saith, *I am not.*" The Jews thought, before the Messiah would come, Elias the Tishbite, who had lived in the times of Ahab, would himself personally return from heaven. This was an error. The meaning of the ancient prophecy was not that Elias would again come down from heaven, but that a man would come in the spirit and power of Elias. This prophecy was fulfilled in John. But the meaning of those asking was: Art thou that Elias who was taken to heaven in a fiery chariot? Therefore, not to be misunderstood by them, John answered: I am not. Again they ask: "*Art thou that prophet?* And he answered, *No.*" John was indeed a prophet, and more than a prophet, but here again the Jews were laboring under an error. They thought, when the Messiah would come, He would be accompanied by a special prophet, and these men wanted to know, if John claimed to be *that* prophet. Therefore he again answered: No, I am not the prophet whom you mean.

Surely, John confessed a good confession before that high and influential embassy. If he would have answered them

according to their wish and liking it would, doubtless, have brought him great earthly advantage, but, though they would have offered him the whole Roman empire, he sent them away with No and Nothing. And in regard to this he did not leave them in doubt. He used no dubious words, but spake clear and plain. They did not need to study over his answer, whether it was piped or harped. That trumpet in the desert did not give an uncertain sound.

John's confession is to be an ensample for us. What we are not we must not pretend to be. John's answers were short and distinct: No, I am not. He was not a hypocrite. What he was not he did not profess to be. If a man claims to be what he is not that is deceit and not a confession, and "the Lord will abhor a deceitful man." Ps. 5, 6. Neither was John enticed by honor and gain to deny the truth. Honor and gain must not bind the tongue. That which we know to be God's truth, we must never deny for the sake of expediency. We must steadfastly confess the truth, though it cost us the friendship of men and worldly gain. Manifold are the advantages which the world offers for denying God's truth: the wicked offer their friendship; secret societies their assistance; errorists honors and gratifications. Be not enticed thereby, but always say: That which I know to be God's truth I will also confess before men, and if in turn I must experience the hate of men, or must sustain worldly loss, yea must even lose the love of those nearest and dearest on earth, it is sufficient unto me if my God honor me. "Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt." Hebr. 11, 24. Better far to lose the whole world than to deny the truth of God; for whosoever denies that truth, denies Christ Himself, because the Lord not only says: "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me," but also adds, "and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come." Mark 8, 38.

Again, as John put his confession in words which were not

dubious, so should we be careful to use words which may not be misunderstood. This is an important point in our times, when dubiousness of confession is, so to say, the order of the day. Do you, when meeting with infidels, make such concessions to them as to leave them under the impression that you only half believe the Bible? Do you talk of religion with the children of the world, but in such a manner that they think you in no great earnest about it? Are you, when speaking with those erring in the doctrine, careful not to contrast truth and error too sharply? Alas! that so many professing Christians, when called on to make a confession, do it in words giving only an uncertain sound. Even whole church bodies seek after formulas to which different parties may subscribe, so that in words they agree while differing widely in sentiment. But what is this? Certainly double-dealing, and not confessing. John did not so. When those questions were proposed to him, he might have made a speech of an hour or two, so that they who were sent to him would have stood in amazement and would finally not have known, whether John meant to say yea or nay. John's answers had neither hooks nor crooks. Our confession should always be round, sound, plain, straightforward, bearing the true character of a confession. If a skeptic ask you, what you think more reliable, science or the Bible, and you make many words to demonstrate, that the Bible might be explained in agreement with science, will not such a confession, or rather denial, serve only to strengthen that man in his infidelity? We Christians must not only "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us," but we should also give that answer in such a way as to leave no doubt concerning what we do and what we do not believe, so that, though our testimony be rejected, it may leave a sting in the consciences of the enemies of the truth.

So John did; for after confessing what he was not, he also frankly confessed, what he was: "*I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.*" Remarkable! When a chance was given John to claim honor for himself he, we might almost say,

gruffly said no, but called on to say what he was he answered in words of the Scriptures: "*I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness.*" John did not make himself more, but he did also not make himself less than he was. For himself he claimed no honor, but what God had made him that he freely confessed. We should freely confess what we are not, but we should also not deny what God has made us and has given unto us. This every true Lutheran will do. It is frequently said of us Lutherans that we are proud and want to be better than others. This saying is not true. In ourselves we are not a whit better than others; for we are children of Adam as well as others, but this we do say that God has given to our Church the pure doctrine of His Word, not because of our merit, but because of His mercy. Of ourselves we say that we are children of Adam as well as the barbarians are, but of God's doings we say that He has given us the knowledge of His truth, although we deserved it not. And this is to be our constant confession that we are nothing, and that "the Lord hath done great things for us," in order that men may see that we seek not our own honor, but the honor of God.

This too is noteworthy in John's confession that he was not backward in confessing that very truth which he knew to be most offensive to them that were sent to him. He says: "*Make straight the way of the Lord.*" They that were sent were of the Pharisees who trusted in themselves that they were pious, but John plainly told them, they were not fit for the kingdom of heaven, they must turn to repentance and look for salvation to the One coming after him. Our modern expediency men would say, John might have known that this would offend those men, as it also did. John did not go by expediency. We must never aim to conceal, or to avoid confessing those truths which are most offensive to people. A true physician will prescribe to each patient the remedy which will cure his ailing, let it taste never so bitter. We should always be intent on setting those truths before men which are most needful to them, and if they will not receive them we shall be without responsibility.

And what! if men will not receive our testimony? If they hate us and persecute us because of the confession of the truth? John the Baptist's head was carried to king Herod in a charger, but from the confession of the truth he did not waver. In the world the confession of the truth brings evil reward, but we seek our reward not in this world, yea rather, we look not for any reward, but because in Christ Jesus we have the forgiveness of sin, life and salvation, therefore we confess Him and His truth before men.

III.

This confession of John was not pleasing to the members of that august embassy, and they now began to assail his preaching and his practice; for "*they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?*" They clearly meant to say: If thou art neither Christ nor a prophet thou oughtest to know that thou owest subjection and an account of thy doings to the priests at Jerusalem, thy spiritual superiors, and how canst thou, without their permission or sanction, introduce this new thing of baptizing with water for the remission of sins? They accuse him of transgressing God's order and of bringing up a new and heretical thing. This was a grave accusation; for it is not allowable that a single man should undertake arbitrarily to change a single ceremony in the church, much less to introduce a new sacrament.

But John knew of whom he was called and he had a ready answer. "*I baptize with water; but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; he it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.*" He said: I need not to be authorized by the high council at Jerusalem. I have my authority from Him who is coming after me and who was before me. I am the servant, He is the Lord; I apply the water, He works the forgiveness of sin. John had the authority of the God-man; for Jesus Christ was born after John and yet He was before John, and God Himself bare witness to the truth of John's testimony, when at the

baptism of Jesus the heavens were opened, the Spirit descended and abode on Him and the Father said: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Well might John baptize for the remission of sins, because he did it by the command of Him who was come to earn forgiveness for sinners and who had the authority to institute new means through which to impart His forgiveness unto men.

After this One those priests and Levites ought to have inquired that they might have learned to know Him, but they did not. John's preaching was not pleasing to them, and they had no inclination to inquire after Him by whom John was sent.

Art thou like unto them? Dost thou know Jesus Christ, or is He yet a stranger unto thee? He is thy brother, partaker of thy flesh and bone, and dost thou not know Him? He laid down His life for thee, becoming obedient unto the shameful death of the cross, and thou knowest Him not? He has earned for thy soul the cleansing from sin by His blood, and thou knowest Him not? He came to thee in holy baptism to establish a covenant of grace with thee, and dost thou not know Him? O haste, and employ all means to learn to know Him. Hear His Word, search the Scriptures, call on His name for the light of His Spirit, and thou shalt experience the blessedness, whereof He speaks in His prayer: "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." John 17, 3. And if thou knowest Him then confess Him before men, and strive to become ever more familiar with Him, and He will know thee and will own thee and will do for thee what He promised to His own, saying: "And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." Amen.

CHRISTMAS.

FIRST SERMON.

TEXT: And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David): to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. Luke 2, 1-14.

The birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, by the Virgin Mary is the most important event which ever transpired since the world began, neither will it find its equal until time shall end. The night in which the Sun of righteousness arose in Bethlehem is blessed above all nights: blessed in the heavens above, blessed on the earth beneath; blessed in time, blessed in eternity. In that night shone forth the good will of the Father, the love of the Son, the benignity of the Holy Ghost. The deed which God did in that night is the astonishment of the angels, the terror of the devils, the salvation of men. In that night was brought in the First-begotten into the world, of whom it was said: "And let all the angels of God worship him." Hebr.

1, 6. In that night the wonder of wonders transpired: God Himself is become man. In that night a Child was born in whose tiny body dwelt "all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." The Almighty and Infinite is become an infant. The Eternal One, who alone inscribes the names of them that shall be into the book of the living and when the hour-glass of their time has run down blots them out again, did in that night insert His own name into the roll of mortals. In that night the Immaculate, before whom the heavens are not clean, took upon Himself the form of sinful flesh, and now we sinful mortals are called His brothers and sisters. In that night He was born who took upon His shoulders all the sins of all men and found a fount of righteousness copious enough to justify the world before God and the Father.

O an important night! a blessed night! a holy night! a night without an equal! The company of the elect together with all the hosts of the heavens, the cherubim and seraphim, the thrones and dominions, the principalities and powers from eternity to eternity shall sing of the deed done in that night and shall not sufficiently praise it. We, too, stammer infantile thanks unto Him for this amazing deed, and, though our highest praises are inadequate, yet we know that they are pleasing unto Him; for He has come to be our Savior. This is what I would to-day awaken in your hearts: faith, trust, confidence in Him as your Savior. But not only the great mysteries of His incarnation are qualified to enkindle our faith, specially attractive and edifying are also the smaller circumstances of His birth. Permit me to-day to picture to you:

THE KINDNESS AND LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST SHINING FORTH FROM THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF HIS BIRTH.

The life of our Lord Jesus Christ upon earth is very distinct from that of all other men. He alone could say: "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" John 8, 46. In the world's history many great ones of the earth are represented as men of sterling character and great deeds, but if we examine the various circumstances of their life, small events, and particularly

their conduct in private life, we soon find that those great men, famed for virtues, were by no means without faults, yea, perhaps were addicted to degrading vices. Not so with our Lord Jesus Christ. He came into the world to be the Savior of sinners, and not only the great and important events of His life demonstrate this, small circumstances, occurrences apparently insignificant, they all correspond with His office and contain sweet consolation for the sorrowing hearts of penitent sinners. He did not make a step, He did not speak a word, He did not do an act which does not tell us that He is the Friend and Savior of sinners. Indeed, if we examine the small occurrences of His life we are greatly strengthened in our faith and our hearts are made warm in love toward Him. Permit me to prove this from the history of His birth.

The journey of His parents from Nazareth to Bethlehem already contains a very comforting circumstance. According to the counsel of God this journey had to be performed, in order that the prophecy, Jesus should be born in Bethlehem, might be fulfilled; but whilst on other occasions God repeatedly sent command to Joseph by an angel it is remarkable that this journey was brought about by a decree of Cesar Augustus. Yet unborn Jesus subjected Himself to the command of the emperor, and thus indicated that He would be under the law. God could very easily have brought Mary to Bethlehem without its being done in obedience to the law, but it was to be in obedience to the law that even from this small circumstance we might learn that this Child was to be under the law to redeem us from the curse of the law, "that we might receive the adoption of sons." He became a servant on earth, subject to human authority, that we might be made sovereign lords in the kingdom of heaven.

The infant in the stable was a prince by birth. His mother Mary, as well as His foster-father Joseph, were of the royal lineage of David. This is a proof that He is the One who had been promised; for unto David God had said: "I will set up thy seed after thee, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." 2 Sam. 7. This promised eternal king is

Christ; for He sits on the throne of David abiding King forever. But He was a prince without any civil right to the inheritance of a kingdom and without the least prospect of ever obtaining scepter and crown; for his foster-father Joseph was a carpenter and not a king. He was not to be a worldly king, and never came to be one. But why was He a prince without a lawful claim to the inheritance of a throne? Surely, any one who is to be a king and does not inherit a kingdom must conquer one. Christ was a prince by lineage, but without a civil right of succession to a throne, betokening thereby that He came to establish a kingdom by conquest. And He did conquer a kingdom. He invaded Satan's kingdom and took from him his spoil, and now He rules as the King of grace with the scepter of grace over all those souls which hunger and thirst after the grace of God. In civil law He had no more any claim to the throne of His father Solomon, but He conquered a kingdom, and if He was strong enough to deliver our souls which Satan had bound with such strong fetters, He is also able to preserve them unto life everlasting.

The child Jesus was a prince by birth, but a very poor prince indeed. Of the riches of Solomon nothing descended to Him. He was born lowly as ever a beggar's child can be born. What His poverty signifies, Paul declares when writing to the Corinthians: "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." 2 Cor. 8, 9. We were poor, poor in our souls, poor in God, poor in heaven; and He became poor on earth, poor in money, poor in friends, poor in joy, to earn for us the fatness of His house, the friendship of the angels, the pleasures of the new Jerusalem. Through His temporal poverty eternal riches are ours. He brings us nor gold, nor silver; He brings us the white linen of righteousness before God.

Jesus was born in a village. At present the place numbers about 2,000 inhabitants and in all likelihood it was not very much larger at that time; for the prophet Micah 5, 2 says: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among

the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel." Why did He prefer to be born in a village rather than in a splendid city? In a village He was more easily found than in a city. To find a stranger in a large city is often not easy, and who could find an infant, as yet without a name, in a city like Richmond? Christ was born in a village where He was easily found, because He desires to be found by every one. The shepherds did not need to wander about long to find Him; for the town was not large. Thou, too, needest not wander about far, if thou wouldst find Him, for He is the King of glory who cometh unto thee, the good Shepherd who seeks thee. Seeking some one in a large city you are in anxiety about finding him. Seeking Jesus you need be in no such anxiety. He comes to you even at this Christmas-day. See, that you receive Him kindly. He is worthy of a kind reception; for He brings you the bread of life, even as the name of His birthplace indicates.

Bethlehem means Bread-house, or House of Bread. Around Bethlehem much grain was raised, whence its name. It is significant that Christ was born in a village with this name. All works of God agree in harmonious symmetry. Fitly is He born in Breadhouse who is the Bread of life. He says: "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger." John 6, 35. As natural bread is the nourishment of the body, so Christ is the nourishment of the soul. The soul in which Christ dwells is satiated; its desires are stilled. Natural bread satiates the body for a time, Christ satiates the soul forever. He that partakes of natural bread will hunger again, but the soul that partakes of this Bread of life will hunger no more, even as the Lord said to the Jews: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world." John 6, 51. Jesus is so precious a food for the soul as both to satiate it and to give it strength and vitality to live forever. The soul which partakes of this food cannot die, because its food is a living food. At Christmas you give sweetmeats to your children and

friends; do not let your own souls starve, but feed them with the bread which came down from heaven that they may be filled with life and light and joy. Behold, the love of the Father in sending this living bread down from heaven. Do not, do not despise His love, but take and eat. Why! the whole earth is now become a Bethlehem, a Breadhouse. The bread of life is scattered among all nations, and would you let your souls starve in such great affluence? Because He came to be the food of our souls this Child was not only born in Bethlehem, the Breadhouse, He was also laid in a manger. That which is put in a manger is not put there for safe keeping, but to serve for food. O let Him not complain: I am the bread of life, but no man desires me. Rather say unto Him: Lord, I am an hungered, feed me. And let no one be bashful in stretching forth his hand for this Bread; for in order that no hungry soul might be abashed by the sense of its unworthiness He was born, not in a palace, but in a stable.

Jesus was born in a stable. We are not to pity Him on account of this. We should rather rejoice over it; for it, too, affords sweet consolation. If a common man is to enter a kingly palace his heart palpitates and his feet are loth to ascend the marble steps, particularly if his dress is torn and soiled; but who is afraid to enter a stable? Some are; the proud are, they fear to soil their finery. So the self-righteous will have nothing of Christ's righteousness, because they think themselves clean, or clean enough without being washed by Him, but unto us who know our uncleanness before God that stable is a welcome shelter. If He had been born in a stately palace we might think, He had come only for noble and well-dressed people, to such whose consciences are not soiled with flagrant sin, but being born in a stable, an unclean place, surely represents Him as coming to the unclean. He was born in an unclean place, because He came to take upon Himself our uncleanness. Soiled and ragged clothes are not a hindrance in entering a stable. If your soul is soiled by wickedness and your heart rent by remorse, do not dread to go to Jesus and to cast down your sins at His feet; for He is come to bear our iniquity. Or

do you perhaps say, your conscience is *too* badly scarred, your soul *too* much soiled? Surely, the deeper the sense of your abjectness, the more should it drive you to the stable. Does your conscience say that you are an outcast? Aye, but where do the outcasts find refuge? Do not those who must shun the eyes of men find shelter in stables? Jesus is born in a stable. He is come to save sinners. From his holy sanctuary on high He came to the unclean place of this earth to cleanse the unclean.

Does sin appear before your view
Of scarlet, or of crimson hue?
If black as hell, why should you doubt;
He will in no wise cast you out.

Does He save sinners? Will He not cast out? O let me seek Him! But where is He found? That stable is decayed long since. Shall I climb to mountain tops? Shall I sail to the uttermost parts of the sea? My friend, you will find Him in His swaddling clothes. He was not wrapped in costly silks, an article which only the wealthy can have, He was wrapped in linen cloth as new born babes in warm countries generally are. A very common article which every one can obtain. Even so now He is wrapped in an article common and cheap: the Word and the sacraments. Bibles are cheap, the church-doors are open for every one, the sacraments cost no money: "whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Behold, how excellent His love! Hold His wrappings and you have Him. Hear His Word, use the sacraments, grasp His promises and you shall not fail to find Him, and, having Him, you have the light of life.

Therefore was He born in the night, because He is come to be the light of the world. Fitly in the night; for night it was in the hearts of men. All nations were walking in idolatry and blindness, in vice and hopelessness. Night it remains in the heart until Jesus comes and kindles in it the light of faith and hope. Like a wanderer in a dark night, becoming

aware that he is in the wrong way, but not able to see and not knowing in which direction to turn, becomes more and more bewildered and cannot help himself, so is man without Jesus. Without Him man must walk in uncertainty. His conscience tells him that he is not in the right way to communion with God, but knowing nothing of a safe and sure way, he cannot but walk in uncertain, evil and pernicious ways. Therefore the heathen sought help from their idols and inquired for light from sorcerers and diviners only to sink into deeper darkness. But in Bethlehem has arisen the "true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." John 1, 9. Seek ye light? Seek it not in yourselves. Reason is a light for the life that now is, but of the world to come it knows nothing certain. Seek ye light? Seek it in Him who says: "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." John 8, 12. Receive the Light which shone forth in Bethlehem, and it will be a light unto you even in the valley of the shadow of death.

This Light sent His messengers that very night to turn the darkness into light. This heavenly light of the angels bright did not shine in a temple or a walled city, it appeared to the shepherds in the open field, in token that this child is He of whom the Lord said by the prophet: "I will give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth." Is. 49, 6. There is no place unto which the rays of this Light had never penetrated. Brightly does it shine over us in this far western land. Be glad and rejoice in this Light, all ye that love the light more than darkness.

I have endeavored to set forth that even the smallest circumstance of Christ's birth pictures Him as our Savior. It is but an attempt; for in Him the smallest is too deep for human understanding and too high for human speech. Remember the little that has been said, and rejoice that we have a Savior whose every act is full of comfort and consolation for the soul. Amen.

CHRISTMAS.

SECOND SERMON.

TEXT: Luke 2, 1-14.

When Moses reviewed the great deeds which the Lord had done for the people of Israel, he was filled with admiration of God's mercy and goodness and he exclaimed: "Yea, he loved the people." Deut. 33, 3. When we consider the deed of God which this day commemorates we cannot otherwise than be filled with the admiration of God's condescending love, and we are constrained to open our lips and to say: Yea, He loved the world, loved it with a divine and everlasting love. Since the Word was made flesh, since God is born man we can no more doubt the love of God toward us.

God created man in His image and placed him into Eden to enjoy immortal happiness, but man lent his ear to the voice of the Old Serpent and of his own free choice he deserted to the camp of God's enemy. Now God is born man to re-unite man unto Himself, to restore in him the divine image and to bring him again to the paradise lost. Yea, He loved the people.

He came into the world not as a great and mighty Lord. He was not born in the gilded chamber of a splendid palace. No heralds on swift horses with rich trappings were sent out to proclaim His birth. No chambermaids were set to work to prepare a soft bed in a silver cradle. Filled with wonder and love the church sings:

For velvets soft and silken stuff
Thou hast but hay and straw so rough,
Whereon Thou King, so rich and great,
As 'twere Thy heaven dost throne in state.

He was born in a stable and was bedded in a manger. He came in poverty, because He came to make us rich. Yea, He loved the people.

Surely, we have reason to rejoice over His birth. And to enkindle our hearts with the right Christmas joy, let us once more hear

THE MESSAGE ANNOUNCING HIS BIRTH.

Let us consider:

- I. By whom the message was brought; and
- II. What it contains.

I.

The birth of Jesus Christ took place in the stillness of the night, in the seclusion of a stable in a village. The world knew nothing of it and His own people to whom He had been promised so long were not aware of it. In the ordinary course of events it was to be expected that the people of the inn and the next door neighbors would have learned the next morning that an infant had been born in the night. But it was not the will of God that the birth of His Son should remain hidden, it was to be made known unto men that the time was fulfilled and that the promised Deliverer was now born. For His messenger God chose one of His angels bright, and he came upon the shepherds clad in celestial light, and thus ran the message which he brought: "FEAR NOT: FOR, BEHOLD, I BRING YOU GOOD TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY, WHICH SHALL BE TO ALL PEOPLE. FOR UNTO YOU IS BORN THIS DAY IN THE CITY OF DAVID A SAVIOR, WHICH IS CHRIST THE LORD. *And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.*" When the angel had delivered his message the air was presently filled with a multitude of shining spirits and the canopy resounded with the many voiced song: "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*"

This reminds us of something which is of pre-eminent importance in these infidelic times, when so many are not willing to believe that there is anything in existence over and above those things which can be perceived with the bodily senses. Beside this visible world there is an invisible world of spirits,

and this spirit world has exercised a vast influence on man and through him on this visible world.

How did sin and wickedness come into the world? It did certainly not grow out of the ground, neither did God create man wicked, nor did He create him so that he became wicked of himself. God is good and He can in no way be the author of evil. How sin came into the world is a question which puzzled the heathen philosophers and to which they could give no certain answer. We know it. When God had finished the work of creation, He beheld every thing that He had made and it was very good. There was no sin and no evil in the world. But there is a spirit who hates God and is always intent on destroying His works. He, through the serpent, tempted man and succeeded in seducing the first man to transgress the commandment of God and so man became a sinner. When Adam had become a sinner he could no more beget children in the image of God which he had lost, but it is written of him that he "begat a son in his own likeness, after his image," Gen. 5, 3, that is, he begat a son who was of a corrupt and sinful nature like his father.

From the spirit world did sin come into this world. Indeed, Satan, that Old Serpent, who first seduced man, has a vast host of evil spirits under him and he brought them into this world and they established a kingdom of darkness in which they rule over men, as Paul writes: "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not." 2 Cor. 4, 4. These evil spirits seduced men to idolatry, as Paul testifies, saying: "The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God," 1 Cor. 10, 20, and to a thousand harmful and destructive vices. Yea, often evil spirits took bodily possession of men and even unto this day cases of bodily possession by devils occur in heathen lands as missionaries report. From the spirit world did sin come, and by sin death and the army of evils under the sun.

But as there is a world of evil spirits so there is also a world of good spirits. One of these, the angel Gabriel, was sent to the virgin Mary to announce the birth of Him who is called

"the Son of the Highest." This same Gabriel, or another of heaven's highest angels, was the messenger to the shepherds. We see here that the angels of heaven were so rejoiced over the birth of this Child that they crowded the air over and around Bethlehem, singing praises to God in the highest strains. The infant in the stable was not born for the angels, yet they were greatly interested in His birth, seeing those bright spirits which surround the throne of God winged their way to the city of David to sing hymns of joy and praise.

Why did the good spirits rejoice so when God was born man? The apostle John tells us when he writes: "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." 1 John 3, 8. For this reason did the angels of heaven rejoice so greatly over the birth of this Child, because He came to undo the work of Satan and to deliver men again from the power of darkness. And He did commence to destroy the works of the devil so soon as He entered on His public office by delivering those who were bodily possessed of evil spirits. They could not resist Him, but when He commanded them they had to go out. In his first chapter, St. Mark introduces the evil spirits in a man saying: "Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God." They recognized in Him their destroyer and He did so destroy the works of the devil that, through His Gospel, idolatry has been overthrown in many lands and bodily possessions have almost entirely ceased in Christendom.

But bodily deliverance was not the actual object of His coming. He was born into this world to deliver the souls of men from the power of sin and death. This is the grand object of the incarnation of the Son of God that, when the soul leaves the body, it can not be clutched by the evil spirits and dragged down to the place of torment, but shall be taken up by the spirits from on high and carried to the realms of everlasting light. So let us hear *the news which the message of the angel brings*, and let us take it to heart.

II.

"Fear not," says the angel to the terrified shepherds. Ye are sinful mortals and the light of heaven must appear terrible to you, because God dwells in a light which the sinner cannot bear. But here is no cause for terror; for behold I proclaim to you the birth of your Deliverer who comes to take away all cause of terror from your hearts.

Jesus, the Abolisher of fear. If you have Jesus with you, you need not dread the presence of God; for in Christ He is a reconciled Father. With Jesus you need not fear the devil and his minions; for He is their destroyer. With Jesus you need not fear the threats of the law; for He has satisfied the demands of Moses. With Jesus you need not dread the valley of the shadow of death; for He has taken away sin, the sting of death. With Jesus you need fear no evil. Jesus dwelling in your hearts will make all things work together for your good.

"Fear not." Why not? *"For behold I bring you good tidings of great joy."* "Behold"! An exclamation of wonder. Yes, here is the wonder of wonders. The everlasting is become a new-born babe. The Almighty a feeble infant. He was before the hills were made and He is but a day old. The Carrier of the universe must be lifted by His mother. God is made man and yet remains God. The God-Man is bedded in the manger. He was called "Wonderful" by the prophet, and verily He is Himself the greatest of wonders.—"Behold"! An exclamation to direct attention. Look and see and consider well. Here is something worthy of your attention. God is born man. Whosoever hears, let him incline his ear and lay it to heart and weigh it in the mind; for God is born man that man should be born again into a godlike and never-ending life.

"Behold, I bring you good tidings." I am not a messenger of evil. I am not come to threaten you with wrath. I will not summon you to the judgment. When the wife of king Jeroboam came to Ahijah the prophet, to inquire of him about her sick son, he met her with the words: "I am sent to thee

with heavy tidings." Here comes this messenger from heaven, the Lord's angel in heavenly splendor. What does he bring us? What can we expect, we, who have robbed God of His glory and have corrupted our ways before Him? What else could we expect but a heavy message? We are all like unto the prodigal son. We must all confess: "I have sinned against heaven." Hearing that a messenger comes from heaven, must we not feel like turning and fleeing and hiding from him? But behold, he opens his mouth and he says: "*I bring you good tidings of great joy.*" An angel from the God of heaven sent to bring good tidings to men! What greater honor could be done to this earth? That is joy, great joy, in comparison to which the joy of the world is nothing but a fleeting shadow.

What is the joy of the world? O, the world counts Christmas a glorious time. Everybody quits work, and laying aside all cares each one is intent on that which he counts his best enjoyment. Some want dances and parties where liberties are allowed which otherwise are counted very indecent. Some want one luxurious dinner after another, loading themselves with sweetmeats. Some seek the saloon with its drunken brawls, and perhaps go home to abuse their family. And when the holidays are over many a one is sick, or has spots in his conscience which are a troublesome thing. The joy of the world is a vain joy, quickly past and leaving only an empty desire.

And the Christian? He, too, does not despise the earthly gifts of God, he rather truly enjoys them partaking of them in moderation, and much joy does it bring him to cause joy to others, surprising them with gifts. But the Christian's true Christmas joy is the gift of the Father in heaven which is laid in the manger. Honor to the earth that an angel came to it as a messenger from heaven, but his message tells of greater honor. God Himself is born man to walk with men upon earth. And since He is born man to become our brother, who can doubt that He has thoughts of peace towards us?

Tell abroad His goodness proudly,
Who our race hath honored thus
That He comes to dwell with us.

What can He be to us and what can He bring us when He was born so long ago and so far away? Hear the angel say: "*Which shall be to all people.*" He is born unto all people, not one single one excepted. Over Him all people and all sorts of people should rejoice. Rejoice over Him, ye kings; for He is the King of glory. Rejoice over Him, ye princes; for He is the Prince of life. Rejoice over Him, ye lawyers; for He is our Advocate with the Father. Rejoice over Him, ye farmers; for He is the Sower of that heavenly seed which brings forth a never-ending harvest. Rejoice over Him, ye gardeners; for He is the Rose of Sharon. Rejoice over Him, ye soldiers; for He is the Captain of your salvation. Rejoice over Him, ye tailors; for He brings the garments of salvation. Rejoice over Him, ye merchants; for He is come to purchase your souls. Rejoice over Him, ye poor; for He is come to make you rich. Rejoice over Him, ye hungry; for He is the Bread from heaven. Rejoice over Him, ye thirsty; for He has the water of life. Rejoice over Him, ye sick; for He is the Physician of the soul. Rejoice over Him, ye men; for He is the Hero from the tribe of Judah. Rejoice over Him, ye women; for He is the woman's Seed. Rejoice over Him, ye virgins; for He is the Virgin-born. Rejoice over Him, ye children; for He is come to bless you. Rejoice over Him, ye that sit in darkness; for He will be your light. Rejoice over Him, ye weak; for He will be your strength. Rejoice over Him, ye widows; for He will be better unto you than a husband. Rejoice over Him, ye orphans; for He is the everlasting Father. Rejoice over Him, ye lost; for He will guide your feet in the way everlasting. Rejoice over Him, ye sinners; for He is the Friend of sinners. Rejoice over Him all people. Let your hearts be enlarged and your souls lifted up and sing:

My heart for very joy doth leap,
My lips no more can silence keep;
I, too, must sing with joyful tongue
That sweetest ancient cradle song:
Glory to God in highest heaven,
Who unto men His Son hath given,

Why this great joy? "*For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.*" He is born "*unto you.*" This word "*unto you*" asks you to receive Him into your heart. Make it "*unto me*" and let your heart rejoicingly say: Unto me the Savior is born, my Savior, my Jesus. Open thy heart and say unto Him: Open are to Thee all portals. Behold, I am waiting.

Come, dearest Jesus, holy Child,
Make Thee a bed, soft, undefiled,
Within my heart, that it may be
A quiet chamber kept for Thee.

For this purpose was He born into the world that He might be born in our hearts. And O! that every one here present could to-day gladly say: He is born in me. He is mine and I am His. Blessed, thrice blessed are all those in whose hearts He is born. He makes them kings and priests unto their God. Since He came down from heaven for man's sake they that hold to Him must be exalted high as the seraphim. With these let us unite our voices and sing: "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*" Amen.

SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

TEXT: And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them. Luke 2, 15-20.

At Christmas, I invited you to joy and gladness, because of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth in Bethlehem of Judea. With what right did I call on you to rejoice over His birth? If a tried and condemned criminal is standing on the scaffold, but before the deathstroke is dealt a messenger arrives, bringing a pardon which saves him from an ignominious death and restores him to life and liberty, may not such a one fitly and justly be called on to greet the arrival of that messenger with joy and exultation? Ye were such tried and condemned culprits. The law had tried you long ago, and had found you transgressors; for it says: "Ye shall be holy," and ye were not holy. Therefore the law had pronounced the sentence upon you, that you were to die eternally in hell, gnawed by that worm which never dies. But before the sentence was executed this messenger of pardon arrived, who Himself is the destroyer of our death, the conqueror of hell, who has restored eternal life unto us, who brings the message: Ye shall not die, but live. Is not this reason for rejoicing? What! our hearts should not be enlarged with gladness when God Himself has come to us into our flesh to free us from bondage and to transport us to His glorious liberty! Surely, all people at all places even at the uttermost sea should take harps and, chanting rapturous songs of praise,

should nevertheless confess and say: Our praise is not a worthy exaltation of the Lamb of God, which came down from heaven to take away our sins; and though the multitude of the angels should join in with their celestial voices, yet could we not sufficiently praise Him.

But alas! the world cares nothing for His birth. In the midst of Christian lands many thousands blasphemously and publicly deny Him with their tongues, and many more thousands with their deeds. In our degenerate days Christmas, with the majority of those that are called Christians, has lost its original object for which it was introduced by the ancient church. To them it is no more a time to ponder the birth of Christ, but only an extra time for merry-making, to walk in "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." Many celebrate Christmas in such a manner, as though during this time of the year they were at liberty to break every command of God's law. But as in all things which we do, be they great or small, there is a responsibility resting upon us, so also in our celebration of Christmas. It reminds us that the Father in heaven has conferred a gift upon us.

HOW SHOULD WE CONDUCT OURSELVES TOWARD THIS GIFT?

I answer: We should do what the shepherds of Bethlehem did, we should

- I. Seek Christ;
- II. Praise Him.

I.

Of the high festivals which the church celebrates Christmas was introduced last. But it is of equal importance with the others; yea, it is the foundation on which they rest. If we could not celebrate Christmas we would have no Easter and no Pentecost. It is the loveliest of all our church festivals, because it reminds us, that the best and noblest which the heavens contain is given unto us, and thus it portrays the eternal and infinite love of the Father. The sum and summary of all Christmas sermons, if they be Christmas sermons indeed, is

simply this: The Father did not refuse to give us His own and only begotten Son with all that He is and has. Therefore it is also meet for us to consider, under what obligations we are put by this gift of the Father; for every one receiving a gift is under obligations to the giver. That which Christmas brings us, is not only to be our joy so long as the holidays last, it is to be *that* bread by which our souls are nourished all the year round, yea all our lifetime and also in eternity. But if the gift of the Father is truly to be and to remain the nourishment of our souls we must conduct ourselves towards it in the right manner. What are our obligations regarding the Christmas-gift of the Father in heaven?

First of all it is our duty to accept His gift with gladness, and to appreciate it. Despising a gift is an offense against the giver. Christmas reminds us that God the Father has given us a noble gift. Must He not be greatly offended, if we do not consider His gift worthy our notice, and negligently pass it by? Is not that slighting the goodness of God? Christmas is a festival of rejoicing, but there is something grave and serious about its celebration. The God of heaven presents us His very best and dearest. He gives it freely without asking any compensation from us. Must it not excite His anger, if His present is despised? Can He let that man go unpunished, who despises His Son? Of those that despise the Messiah it is written in the prophecies of Malachi: "Behold the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, ~~that~~ it shall leave them neither root nor branch." The connection of the passage shows that the prophet is speaking of the time of the incarnation of the Son of God, and he says, those despising Him would be burnt like stubble. All those despising the gift of the Father will be burnt with unquenchable fire and they will not be few in number. With what jealousy the Father watches over the appreciation of His gift is manifest from the very manner in which He gives it. The Father did give this gift for the whole world; it is there for the most blasphemous scoffers; but those only

who properly appreciate it come into actual possession of it, whereas those who do not appreciate it do also not possess it and only multiply the wrath of God against themselves. Having before praised to you the gift itself let me briefly set forth, how we come into its actual possession.

To be partakers of the gift of the Father we must do what those shepherds of Bethlehem did, we must seek Christ. If those shepherds would have disregarded the message of the angel to them, or, if they would have doubted it, thinking: Who knows whether it is true; or, if they would have said: It may be true, but to seek this Child we would be obliged to leave our flocks in the darkness of the night and they would be in danger of being torn by wild beasts or stolen by thieves, then they would not have found Christ, nor could they have rejoiced over Him. In order to find and possess we must seek. The Lord does not say: He that neglects to seek, will nevertheless find; He says: "He that seeketh, findeth." To him that knocks it shall be opened. The man who does not seek the gift of the Father, will never be in possession of it. Whosoever will not knock at the door of Bethlehem, has no part in Christ, and he justly remains empty-handed. If the master of a house has spread a festive table and invites and urges the guests to help themselves, that guest justly departs hungry, who *will* not do the bidding of the housefather. Even so the hearts of those justly remain empty, who, though invited and urged, will not do the bidding of the Father in heaven; who will not say with the shepherds: "*Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.*" Whosoever would have part in Christ must have a desire for the gift of the Father, he must wish to possess it. As God the Father did not irresistibly force those people occupying the inn at Bethlehem to make room for Joseph and Mary, but rather permitted His Son to be born in a stable, so He does to-day not obtrude His Son upon any one against his will. He lays Him in a manger, and, as it were, cries out unto the world: Here is a gift for you; it is free to all; let every one that would possess it, seek it and take it. If we are never-

theless not in possession of the Father's gift, although He urges it on us, the fault is ours and not His. Let us not be indolent. Let us seek Him, while He may be found. The Father owes us nothing. If we, who are called Christians, no more desire and seek His gift, who knows but that the Father might again let His Son be born in a stable, that is, take the Gospel from us and give it unto heathen nations. If Christ is to dwell with us we must desire and seek Him.

How shall we seek Him so as to be certain of finding Him? If one seeks a thing, but seeks it at the wrong place, or, perhaps with eyes closed, he will not find it. Hence in seeking Christ we must know *how* to seek Him. I answer: We should seek Him in like manner as the shepherds; for they *did* find Him. Now the shepherds sought Him as such, who knew that they were in need of Him; for they were greatly elated at finding Him. Even so should we seek Him, because we stand in need of Him. If we come imagining that we can help ourselves, and need no help, He will have nothing to do with us; for He has not come to help those that can help themselves, His office is to help the helpless. Nor must we seek Him trusting in ourselves that we are righteous, or we will be offended at the form of sinful flesh in which He appeared. We must seek Him as sinners; for He is come to be the Savior of sinners. Not as rich, lest we be offended at the miserable stable, His birthplace, and the manger, His cradle, but as wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. Not as proud and lofty-minded, or the stable door might be too low for us, but with empty heart and hand; for He is come to be our all in all. The language of our heart must be:

In my hand no price I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling.

Those shepherds were not offended at His lowliness and poverty. They did not exclaim: Should we acknowledge such a beggar's child our Lord? Those men were glad, if they did but find Him. Do you say: I would fain be the Lord's, if it would not bring disgrace before the world; but I do not like

to see my neighbors shrugging their shoulders at me. Friend, if that is your sentiment you are seeking yourself and not the Lord. The shepherds were rejoiced to find the Lord, although His surroundings were by no means lordly. If He is truly your heart's desire, you will press on to Him and not look to the consequences or stumble at the opinions of others. We should seek the Lord for His own sake. Seek thou the Lord, remembering what He said to Abraham: "*I am thy exceeding great reward.*" Gen. 15, 1.

The shepherds sought the Child willingly and eagerly. Examine the angel's message, and you will find that he had not commanded the shepherds to seek the Child, nor had he admonished them or even advised them to do so, he had simply proclaimed to them, what they would find at Bethlehem. Yet they say: "*Let us now go even unto Bethlehem.*" They were full of the desire to see Him, willingly they set out to seek Him, cheerfully they left their flocks to hasten to the Lord. We are to seek the Lord with desire and longing, because He is the highest good. Not in a half-hearted way, so that it makes but little difference to us whether we find Him or not, but with zeal and fervor, as men seeking a precious treasure. Willingly should we seek Him and should not wait till misfortunes and afflictions drive us to Him. In good days we are not to say: I do not need the Lord, and when the evil day comes, I will have time enough to turn to Him. In good days we are to seek Him, that He may be with us in the evil day. As it is said of the shepherds: "*They came with haste,*" so we should early and hastily seek the Lord, and not wait till we can find no more pleasure in sin. With gladness we should forsake the world, making the heart free from that which is in the world, to possess "*the Pearl of great price.*" As the shepherds said: "*Let us now go,*" so let us *now* seek the Lord. To-day let us seek Him; before to-morrow comes the clock of our lifetime might perhaps have run down, and who shall seek Him in the grave? To-day God gives His Son, to-day He is to be found, to-day the heavens are open, to-day let us seek Him. Do not let this Christmas-tide pass by without earnestly seeking the Lord.

And if you do seek Him you will surely find Him; for He is come to be found.

Where shall we seek Him? where shall we find Him? The shepherds went to Bethlehem, there they found Him in the manger of a stable. Must we undertake the far journey to Bethlehem in order to find Him? Going there we would find nothing but an impoverished village of several thousand inhabitants, and on the spot where tradition says that Christ was born, we would find a monastery instead of the stable, where we might see the Savior of the world in pictures, but no more as an infant in a manger. In the same manner as the shepherds found the Lord in the stable, He is no more to be found on earth, and a pilgrimage to the Holy Land would not bring us a single step nearer to Him. He is just as near in the uttermost parts of the earth, as at Bethlehem.

But where shall we find Him? Must we complain with the Bride in the Song of Solomon: "I sought Him, but I found Him not." Must we seek Him at random, or has He promised to be found at a certain place and in a certain way? Most assuredly He has, and there where He is to be found to-day, the shepherds had already found Him, even before they found Him bodily in the stable. If the shepherds had not previously found the Lord in a different manner, their finding and seeing Him bodily in the manger would have benefited them just as little as it did the Pharisees, who also saw Him with their eyes, heard His voice with their ears and touched Him with their hands, but nevertheless remained children of wrath. It is not the sensible seeing and feeling the Lord which saves. Judas, His betrayer, had kissed Him, yet the Lord calls him "the son of perdition."

Where and how had the shepherds previously found the Lord? They had found Him by the faith of the Word. They say: "*Let us now go and see this thing which the Lord hath made known unto us.*" Now the Lord had made this thing known unto them in no other way than by the word and message of the angel. In the Word the shepherds found Christ. In the Word we find Him. In His Word He desires to be

sought, and there He will be found; for unto the Jews He testified: "Ye have not his word abiding in you; for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not." John 5, 38. They had not Christ dwelling in them, because they believed not His Word. Therefore He goes on to instruct them where to seek and to find Him, continuing: "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me." He tells them, to have Him abiding in them, they must search the Scriptures. These are His testimonies; in them He is to be found. He and His Word cannot be separated. Where His Word is there He is also. The Word of the Gospel is the manger in which He is laid. If we grasp the Word we have Christ Himself; for He is as good as His Word and will not go back on His promises. Surely, the grace of the Lord is great. He has made it very convenient for us to seek Him. We need not cross the ocean, we need not ascend up to heaven or descend down into the deep, His cradle is His Word and that is nigh unto us, even in our ears. Do you seek Christ? My friend, grasp the cradle and you have the Child.

How can we lay hold of the Word? Evidently not with the hand, but the shepherds say: "*Let us now go and see this thing, which is come to pass.*" Mark well, they do not say: Let us go and see, whether this thing is so, they say: It is come to pass, let us go and see it. They laid hold of the Word by faith, by believing it. They had no doubts of the Word, but depended upon it. Nor must we overlook that they regarded the Word which they heard as the Lord's own Word; for they do not say: Which the angel, they say: "*Which the Lord hath made known unto us.*" They believed the Word, not because an angel had proclaimed it to them, but because it was the Lord's Word. It is not sufficient simply to regard the Scriptures a word of truth; for other writings we also receive as words of truth. We must receive the Scriptures as God's own Word. Neither must we look to the person of the preacher, but to the Word itself. Whether an angel or a sinful man proclaim it, makes no essential difference, because it is not the excellency or the skill of the preacher, but the Word itself which brings

Christ nigh unto us. If we thus hold fast the Word of the Gospel as the Lord's own Word, then we have Him in it. Let us therefore imitate the example of the Thessalonians of whom Paul writes: "When ye received the word of God, which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God." 1 Thes. 2, 13. Behold the importance of clinging to the Word. Let us search the Scriptures with eagerness, knowing that, if we have His Word, the Lord Himself can not be far distant from us.

II.

In the second place, the shepherds set us an example for imitation in their praising the Lord. On this permit me but a very few words. The shepherds returned to their flocks "*glorifying and praising God*," and in particular it is said of them: "*When they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.*" Those men were so rejoiced at finding the Lord that they could not be silent, they had to speak of Him to all whom they met. Their hearts were so full that they could not refrain from singing praises to God, or from communicating their joy to others. When we have found the Lord we must exalt His praise, and this is one of the chief praise-offerings which we can bring to Him freely to confess His name upon earth before friend and foe, high and low. Those shepherds very likely met some high-standing and proud people, but they were not ashamed to speak to them of the Child in the stable. Never must we be ashamed to confess Christ before men. The scornful smile of respected and influential men of the world should not deter us from speaking of our Savior. This praise, confessing Him before men, is so pleasing to Him, that He has promised to confess those in heaven who confess Him on earth. Though we make ever so many discouraging experiences, we should ever again speak of our Lord, and thus strive to make others also partakers of our joy. Those shepherds were the first Christian missionaries, spreading abroad the fame of Christ. Praying for those who yet walk in darkness and striving to win souls for Him in

our family, in our neighborhood and wherever we find occasion to speak of Him, is an offering of sweet smelling savor unto the Lord, praise "pleasant and comely."

And now let us imitate the virgin Mary who "*kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.*" Let us not forget the Christmas tidings in a day or a week. Let us store them away in our memory, not to let them lie there idle, but to occupy our minds with them and to converse on them in our hearts. It is a glorious thing that the Lord did not only once come into our flesh to redeem us, but daily comes to us in His Word. Let us keep His Word in our hearts that He depart not again, but abide with us continually. Amen.

NEW YEAR'S DAY.

TEXT: And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb. Luke 2, 21.

Dearly beloved fellow Christians!

God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ grant unto you in this new year, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man, that throughout the year, Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, and ye may be rooted and grounded in love, knowing that the love of Jesus is better than wisdom and riches.

The return of the year teaches too solemn and useful a lesson, as that we Christians could pass it by unnoticed, though New Year's day, as such, is not a church festival. The change of the date on our almanacs appears to be an insignificant thing, but it proves to us that it is true what Solomon says: "All is vanity." There is nothing stable under the sun, everything is subject to change. Transient is every earthly thing. Time is transient; it continually progresses, and no one can stay it. The past year is passed and gone, and cannot be called back again. Time is like a shadow which passes by and returns no more.

As time is so must everything be which is in time and subject to time. It must all be temporal, vain and vanishing. Examine the rocks of our mountains, and you will find that even they are subject to decay. Like wind and weather all earthly things are continually changing. They are variable as the moon. What is wealth, honor, happiness? It is like the Chameleon which often changes color suddenly. The man who to-day is rich, honored, happy, may to-morrow be poor, despised, miserable. Most impressively does David picture the vanity

of man's life and doings when he says in the 39th Psalm: "Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. Behold, thou hast made my days as a handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Surely every man walketh in a vain show; surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them." David desired this knowledge from the Lord that his life and doings were vanity. Man's life and doings are indeed a vain, transient thing. Where are those stately Romans who rode in golden vehicles and prided themselves in being lords of the earth? They have disappeared like a shadow; scarcely a few of their names have been handed down to us. Of all the myriads who have lived in the lapse of time the names of some thousands are inscribed on the pages of history, the rest have passed away without leaving a trace behind them. What shall be known of us a hundred years hence? Our place will know us no more, yea, perhaps the very remembrance of us will be forgotten; no one will know that we ever were, and no one will care to know. Man lives a short time on the earth and then sinks into oblivion.

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away;
They fly, forgotten, as a dream
Dies at the opening day.

Yet man lives so securely as though the earth were to be his dwelling place forever, and he considers not that his days are as a handbreadth.

Of the vanity of all earthly things the return of the year reminds us, and it should persuade our hearts unto wisdom, to seek the things which are not vanity, which will cause our names to be remembered forever. Where shall we seek them? Not in the things of this earth; for "the world passeth away and the lust thereof," and the works of man crumble to atoms. Seek the tower of Babel which was to reach up to the skies! Ask for the names of its builders! They are forgotten, and

they will never be known; for they were proud men, and their names are not written in the book of life. By great deeds we cannot inscribe our names on the indelible pages of eternity; only by holding fast the covenant, which the Immortal One has made with us, shall our names be immortalized in heaven. To do this I beseech you through the mercy of my Lord at the beginning of this new year.

When do we close the old and begin the new year in a manner pleasing to God? I answer:

WHEN WE DO IT IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

In His name we end the old and begin the new year, if we

I. Believe that He is the propitiation for the sins of the past; and

II. That He will be our Helper and Savior in the future.

I.

“And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called Jesus.” Circumcision was in the Old Testament what baptism is in the New, the sacrament of reception into the covenant of grace with God. As baptism “works the forgiveness of sin, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation,” so in the Old Testament the children of the Israelites through circumcision obtained the forgiveness of sins, were delivered from the power of death and the devil, and were made heirs of eternal life. As Peter said of baptism: “Be baptized for the remission of sins,” Acts 2, 38, so circumcision was for the remission of sins.

Now in our text we read of the Child Jesus: *“And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child.”* The child whose birth we celebrated eight days ago, was also circumcised; it, too, received the sacrament of the forgiveness of sins and of deliverance from death and the power of the devil. Does not this contradict the words of the angel to the virgin Mary when he said: “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee;

therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." This Child was not conceived and born in sin like other children. He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," even from the womb. What strange thing is this that He was circumcised? If He was holy and undefiled from sin, why did He receive the sacrament which was instituted for the remission of sins? If He was the Son of the Most High, why did He receive the sacrament of reception into the covenant of grace with God? If we would tell an angel of heaven that he must be baptized, what would he answer? Would he not say: I am not a sinner, like you mortals on earth, and I need not be baptized for the remission of sins. Where there is no sin, baptism would have no meaning, because it is "for the remission of sins."

But here we behold this wonderful spectacle that the Most Holy One, God's own Son, is circumcised. Think of God coming down from heaven and being baptized as though He were a sinner needing forgiveness! Jesus Christ, who is the true God, is circumcised as though He were a sinner and needed forgiveness. Infidels and Rationalists would call this a flat contradiction, saying, if He had been the true God, He could not have consented to receive the sacrament of the forgiveness of sin. But we Christians must not be led away from the Word by the inferences of human reason. It is, indeed, a wonderful thing that the same one whom the angel called "Christ, the Lord," after eight days was circumcised as though He had been born a sinner like other children; but in this wonderful thing is embraced the mystery of our redemption. St. Paul explains this beautifully when he writes to the Galatians 4, 4: "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." This Child was not a sinner, and not subject to the law. He had committed no sins, and for His own person did not need circumcision. Nevertheless He was put under the law and was circumcised as though He were a sinner. Wherefore? St. Paul answers: "To redeem them that were under the law." He was

not subject to the curse of the law, but others were; He had not sinned, but others had; He did not need forgiveness, but others did. Therefore He was circumcised not for His own sake, but for the sake of others. Who "these others" are the apostle defines when he adds: "That *we* might receive the adoption of sons." *We*, you and I, had sinned and needed forgiveness. Therefore Christ was put under the law to fulfill it in our stead, and so to deliver us from the curse of the law. He was circumcised for our sake to earn forgiveness of sins for us.

We have sinned, and that the sins, even of the past year alone, have been neither few nor small we cannot deny, neither should we attempt to deny it. And from eternal Justice the decree has long since gone forth: "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." Gal. 3, 10. This decree puts us under the curse; for none of us can say that he has done "all things which are written in the book of the law." But there was One in heaven who was moved with compassion to us-ward, and He made this agreement with eternal Justice, that He would come down to the earth, He would assume our nature, He would step into our shoes, would put Himself under the law and in our stead would fulfill its requirements and for His sake we should go free from the curse. At Christmas we heard from the message of the angel that He did come, and our to-day's Gospel tells us that He went to work very early to fulfill the contract made with Justice in eternity and revealed to the patriarchs of old. When eight days old He was circumcised, He the Holy One, as though He were a sinner, and so He demonstrated that He had taken our place under the law. Let fastidious persons say of our text, the Bible ought not to speak of such things as circumcision, because they were offensive to delicacy; to us who, by the grace of God, have come to an understanding of the counsel of God unto salvation, know that this text is one of the most glorious verses in the whole Bible, because it tells us that we have a Savior who did perform the requirements of the law. Those drops of blood which He shed at His circumcision are unto us the earnest, the pledge that He did do what He had

agreed on with eternal Justice, and hence that the penalty pronounced by the law is removed from us.

That we have not kept the law can now no more prevent our salvation, because Christ has kept it for us. Though I have transgressed the law, yet Christ has fulfilled it for me. If now I grasp Christ's fulfillment of the law and appropriate it unto myself as mine own, then I have a fulfillment of the law, and this is just as good and just as valid before God as though I had never broken the law, but had kept it most perfectly; "for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." Rom. 10, 4. This is our trust that Christ is the propitiation for our sins; that His fulfillment of the law is ours; and if we do heartily believe this, then the sins of the past year are, before God in heaven, a thing of the past and are no more taken into account against us. This is the way to rid ourselves of the sins of the old year, to claim the work of Jesus as our own. This is ending the old year in the name of Jesus, to believe it, to rejoice over it that He saves us from our sins.

II.

If we so by faith in Him begin the year in the name of Jesus, we have a quiet conscience concerning the past, knowing that He is the propitiation for our sins; and in Him we have a Helper for the future, a Friend on whom we can depend. "*His name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.*" Jesus was the personal name of the Lord, the name by which He was known when walking on earth. It was not by accident, nor merely by human choice, it was by the counsel of God that He received this name Jesus; for He "*was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.*" Before His conception His name was given Him by an angel. It is not an earthly, or human, but a heavenly, a divine name. Not His mother, God chose it. Now if God gave Him a name it must surely be an appropriate name, and so it is; for His name tells us what He is and what He does. His name was given Him when He was circumcised, and even then He was already doing what His name denotes;

for the word Jesus means Redeemer, Deliverer, Helper, Savior. *Savior* is the name of the Child circumcised at Bethlehem. The reason why this name was given Him the angel tells us when saying unto Joseph: "Thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins." He is the true Jesus, He is *the* Savior.

In earthly things there are many that may be called saviors. A skillful doctor is a savior in sickness, when he gives wholesome medicine; parents are saviors of their children, providing for them; kings are saviors of their subjects, when defending them; money is a savior out of many difficulties to him that possesses it. But these all are poor saviors. When need is greatest they forsake those who trust in them. A doctor cannot cure death; money cannot deliver from the compunctions of conscience. When remorse begins to lacerate the heart, when the law, death and hell strike terror to the soul, when Satan begins to say: Thou art a sinner and thou art mine, then all earthly saviors forsake us, then their comfortings are vain and they become manifest as miserable saviors. But when need is greatest then Jesus is the true Savior; for He has come to save us from our greatest need, to save us from our sins. Insignificant are all external evils in comparison to the evil of sin; for temporal afflictions, though they last for years, last for a time only, but sin drags down to eternal destruction. Though I would be obliged to beg my bread at the doors of hard-hearted strangers, and though I must sleep under the canopy of heaven and be made wet by the dews, yet having Jesus for my Savior I would be far better off than a millionaire who has made *gold* his savior; for gold will procure comforts and luxuries for the body, but Jesus will deliver out of every trouble. If the burdens of this life oppress me, Jesus, my Savior, cheers the heart with the hope of a better life to come and He knows how to soften every sorrow and sweeten every toil. If my sins trouble me, Jesus, my Savior, is come to save me from my sins. If Satan accuses me, I answer: What right shouldst thou have to condemn since Jesus, my Savior, hath bruised thy head? If hell threatens to devour me, I answer: Jesus, my Savior, as-

cended on high and led captivity captive. Though I must walk through the valley of the shadow of death I have a staff on which to lean: Jesus, my Savior. A bright star of the morning greets me from beyond the river of death: It is Jesus, my Savior. O! what sweetness is comprised in the word Jesus, Savior.

None shall claim my heart beside,
None but Jesus crucified;
Savior, I am only Thine,
Other love shall ne'er be mine.

"Thy name is as ointment poured forth," says the Bride in the Song of Solomon. Delightful to the believing soul is the name of Jesus, delicious as the savor of precious ointment, lovelier than the lily of the valley, sweeter than the rose of Sharon. Shall we not in this dear Name begin the year?

Dark the year lies before us. None of us can tell, what it will bring him, whether it will exalt him on earth, or lay him low in the dust. We Christians who do not seek that which is of the world, but have our eye fixed on the eternal home above, can, as pilgrims in a strange land, not expect much good in the world. Of some things we do know that they will be in this new year. Satan will be our enemy, the world will tempt us, our own flesh and blood will try us, perhaps death will knock at our door. Where shall we find one to depend on for comfort, help and deliverance? Thanks be to God, we know of one: Jesus, our Savior. "Our God is the God of salvation; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death." Ps. 68, 20. Begin the year in the name of Jesus. If He is with you, you can be bold against Satan; for He is come to destroy the works of the devil. If He is with you, you can triumph over the threats and allurements of the world; for He has overcome the world. If He is with you, you can rule over the sin dwelling in your members; for He gives the Spirit that lusteth against the flesh. If He is with you, you can be cheerful in affliction; for if you suffer with Him, you shall also reign with Him. If He is with you, you have a Friend whose "loving kindness changes not." Trusting in His name we can cheerfully sing:

Jesus' Name shall lighten pain,
And in all our ills relieve us;
Losses thus shall turn to gain,
And to blessings what seemed grievous;
Jesus' Name is Sun and Shield,
Here must all our sorrows yield.

In this world everything is changeable, and man more changeable than aught else. Man is indeed to-day red, to-morrow dead, to-day rich, to-morrow poor, to-day glad, to-morrow sad, to-day respected, to-morrow rejected, to-day beloved, to-morrow hated.

Thank God, that in this world of changeableness we have one thing which does not change, the Word of our God, which tells us of the Rock of Ages cleft for us. In Him let us hide our souls; then let times change, let fortunes change, let men change; in the clefts of the Rock of Ages there is an unchangeable hiding-place. May you dwell in Him and He in you. Amen.

SUNDAY AFTER NEW YEAR.

TEXT: And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: and was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my Son. Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not. But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: and he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene. Matt. 2, 13-23.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was made of the seed of David according to the flesh, as it had been foretold; for thus God had spoken unto David by Nathan the prophet: "I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." 2 Sam. 7, 12. From this and other similar passages of the Scriptures the Pharisees, as blind leaders of the blind, concluded that, when the Messiah would come, He would establish a worldly kingdom and would rule at Jerusalem as a mighty monarch. They were blind leaders indeed. Had they examined the Scriptures with an unbiassed mind they must soon have understood that

Christ, being an everlasting king, could not be a worldly monarch. Earthly kings are of few days and must soon leave their dominion to others. But the idea that the Messiah would make Jerusalem the capital of a mighty kingdom, suited the carnal wishes of the Pharisees, and so they themselves adopted it and taught it to the people. In the time of Christ, therefore, it was the common belief amongst the Jews that the Messiah would liberate them from the dominion of the Romans and would make them a ruling nation on the earth. So deeply was this false opinion concerning the nature of Christ's kingdom rooted in the minds of the people that it was extremely difficult for the apostles to extricate themselves from it. On the day of the Lord's resurrection those two disciples going from Jerusalem to Emmaus yet said: "We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel." Luke 24, 21. He had truly redeemed Israel with an everlasting redemption, but they meant a different kind of redemption, namely, civil and political redemption. Even at the Lord's ascension the disciples still asked: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" Acts 1, 6. To the very last they cherished the fond hope that He would restore liberty and self-government to the Jews. Not till after the outpouring of the Holy Ghost did the apostles fully understand the nature of Christ's kingdom. This false notion, inculcated by the Pharisees, is entertained by the Jews unto this day. Fondly, but vainly do they expect the Messiah yet to come, to gather them out of all nations and to establish a glorious kingdom at Jerusalem.

In Christendom also many have erroneous and mistaken views concerning the nature of Christ's kingdom. The Roman Catholics teach that the church is a visible body under a visible head, that it should have authority over the civil powers and should reign in worldly glory. Millenarians, similar to the Jews, harbor the fond dream that Christ would come to rule over the earth in a visible kingdom for a thousand years. Many, when they have embraced Christ, think, they ought now to fare happily and prosperously in all things.

All such opinions, as though Christ's kingdom should be an

external kingdom, glorious in this world, or, as though following Christ ought to bring worldly blessings and happiness, are against the nature of Christ's kingdom on earth and they are in conflict with the Scriptures. Neither should they be regarded as harmless; for they bring great danger to the soul. Of those like unto seed sown on a rock the Lord says: "Which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away." Luke 8, 13. When temptation comes upon them, they fall away. If a man thinks, in following Christ, his path must be smooth and he must fare happily, and then he finds that he must climb over rocks and suffer wounds from thorns, he is in great danger of being offended in Christ, and is tempted to turn back and to walk no more with Him. To avoid these dangers it is important to be rightly informed as to the nature of Christ's kingdom, in order that we may know what to expect of Christ and with Christ. Let us therefore to-day consider:

THE NATURE OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM AS SHOWN BY HIS
FLEEING TO EGYPT AND THE MURDER OF THE
INFANTS AT BETHLEHEM.

We learn here:

- I. That Christ's kingdom is a kingdom of the cross; and
- II. That in it is manifested the hidden power of God unto salvation.

I.

At His birth and again at His presentation in the temple glorious things were spoken of the child Jesus. In addition to this wise men from the far East came to Jerusalem inquiring: "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him." Matt. 2, 1. And when they found Him at Bethlehem they worshiped Him, and opening their treasures "they presented unto him gifts: gold, and frankincense and myrrh." Thus far the history of Christ speaks unto us of honor and praise brought unto Him both by angels and men. But very soon He had to suffer the persecution of men. He was come into the world to be a landmark of salvation to the meek and the lowly, the contrite and

the broken-hearted. Hence it could not be otherwise but that He must be a rock of offense to the proud, a stumbling-block in the way of the world, a sign offensive to all who are not contrite and broken-hearted. When still an infant He was in the way of one mighty on earth; for when the wise men had departed, "*the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word; for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.*"

This Herod was not a Jew, but an Edomite, a descendant of Esau. An ambitious man and favored by opportunity he succeeded with the aid of the Romans to make himself king over Judea. History tells of few tyrants so unfeeling and blood-thirsty as he. He spared not his nearest relatives, but under nefarious pretenses he put many of them to death, including his sister, his wife and three of his sons. When this blood-thirsty tyrant heard by the wise men that the long expected King of the Jews was born at Bethlehem he at once began to fear for his throne. Herod wanted to remain king and to perpetuate his throne. Therefore this child was in his way, and he was quickly resolved that it must be put out of the way. When an infant Jesus was already hated and His destruction plotted. He had to flee for His life and He did flee. Wonderful spectacle! The King of kings, who in the eighth chapter of Proverbs says: "By me kings reign, and princes decree justice," flees to save His life from the hands of a petty tyrant.

Behold here the nature of Christ's kingdom on earth. When He was born there was no room for Him in the inn, He had to be born in a stable in great lowliness and poverty. Now there was no room for Him in Bethlehem, nay, not in all Judea. He had to become an exile from the land of promise and had to seek safety in that land in which Israel had once been held in bondage. And He did flee. He might have stayed at Bethlehem. He might have taken up the contest with Herod. He might have caused fire to fall from heaven and consume the murderers sent by Herod. He might have stationed the angels a fiery wall around Bethlehem. He might have inspired the

people of the Jews with sudden courage to rise up against their oppressors, and He might have given victory to their arms to drive both Herod and the Romans from the land, and to seat Him on a throne of gold and ivory. That, that would have been something great and glorious before the world. Then His praise would have been in every mouth. But He flees! That is inglorious, disgraceful before the world. In like manner we read at the end of this Gospel: "*But when he (Joseph) heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee; and He came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth.*" Here again we behold Him seeking safety in obscurity. He hides to escape the power of a man. He "made himself of no reputation," says St. Paul, "and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself." Phil. 2, 7. He surely humbled Himself when He submitted to flee from the country by night, when He took upon Himself exile and hardships, and sought seclusion to escape the hands of wicked men. All this is not glory in the sight of men.

Now as the King, so the kingdom. The Christian must fare similarly on earth as did Christ; for He said to the disciples: "The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." John 15, 20. Christ experienced the hate of the wicked and endured all manner of suffering on earth; even so the citizens of His kingdom must also be hated by men and must undergo sufferings. This is illustrated here by two plain examples. The first is Joseph and Mary. On account of the Child Jesus they were obliged suddenly to arise by night, to forsake all and set out on a long and perilous journey to a strange land, and when they returned even then they were not free to choose their place of abode. For the Child's sake they had to dwell in seclusion. The persecution aimed at Christ fell upon them; they had to take part in it. And not only they, but also the infants in and around Bethlehem; for Herod, "*when he saw that he was*

mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men." For Christ's sake these children had to suffer death. It did not simply happen so to them, because Herod was a bloodthirsty tyrant; for Herod would never have thought of putting those children to death if it had not been for this Child Jesus.

In these latter days the name of Christ has become great on the earth; nevertheless His kingdom is still a kingdom of the cross. Unto this day following in the footprints of Christ does not bring honors and worldly advantages. The true Christian, walk he never so inoffensively, is hated by the wicked and despised by the world. Many a humiliation must he experience and many a conflict must he endure.

Nevertheless there is victory and glory in the cross of Christ. Though in the judgment of the world the kingdom of Jesus Christ appears weak, fleeing, vanquished, perishing, there is a hidden power active in it which makes it triumphant in persecution, victorious in defeat, invincible to the enemies. This power is hidden to the world, but manifest to them with whom is "the secret of the Lord." Ps. 25, 14. Let us observe the working of this power as shown by our text.

II.

In the secret chambers of his palace king Herod concocted the plan to destroy the new-born King of the Jews. He was certain that the Child was born at Bethlehem, but at Bethlehem there were many children, and not knowing which was the one, Herod resolved not to search out the Child by inquiry; for he feared the parents might be caused to take warning and might flee. To make perfectly sure of the Child's destruction Herod determined to have all children in and around Bethlehem, that were two years old and under, suddenly put to death. This was a bold, wily and, as far as human sagacity goes, a sure plan, because there was no human possibility of Joseph and Mary being warned. But Herod's secret plan was soon made known

to Joseph, and Jesus escaped. Here is that secret, hidden power which is active in the kingdom of Christ. Herod was baffled when he thought he had succeeded in his scheme.

And Herod was not only baffled; by attempting to destroy Christ he only promoted the cause of His kingdom. Herod did succeed in cruelly murdering a large number of innocent children, but who was the gainer and who the loser? Herod was not the gainer; for the One whom he aimed to destroy, escaped him, and the blood of those innocent babes may many a time have risen up before the eyes of his mind an accusing witness and, surely, it burns on his soul forever; but those children, being of Jewish parents, had been received into the covenant of grace by the sacrament of circumcision and were saved. Early were they secured from all danger and made perfect. If Herod was not the gainer, those infants were certainly not the losers. Yea, by the satanic scheme of Herod they obtained the high honor of being the first martyrs for Christ in the New Covenant. Aptly does Luther say on the death of these infants: "This death is unto them a peculiar honor before God and all His angels and saints, and in salvation they will receive a special reward for it." In the judgment of the world Herod fared prosperously and those infants perished miserably, but here again is that secret, saving power in Christ's kingdom which, in fact, made them the victors and Herod the vanquished.

Herod also gave occasion for the fulfilling of the Scriptures. By his persecution Christ was obliged to flee to Egypt, from where He was called back by an angel of the Lord, and so the prophecy was fulfilled. "*Out of Egypt have I called my son.*" Herod caused the mothers at Bethlehem to raise a cry of lamentation over their murdered infants, and so was accomplished the prophecy: "*In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.*" Because Archelaus was also a tyrant, Joseph was afraid to go into Judea and went and dwelt in Nazareth, and so the prophecy was fulfilled: "*He shall be called a Nazarene.*" Behold the

working of that secret power in Christ's kingdom, making Herod subservient for the fulfilling of the Scriptures. Herod thought to destroy Christ, whereby the prophecy of the Scriptures would have been thwarted, and he knew not that his acts served to promote the fulfilling of the Scriptures. Yes, there is an invisible power in Christ's kingdom by which even His persecutors are made instruments for the promotion of His kingdom.

One thing more remains to be mentioned: "*But when Herod was dead.*" Though a fugitive the Child Jesus was living, but Herod died, or rather, he perished in the most miserable manner conceivable. Not long after the murder of those infants a disgusting disease befell him: his body swelled prodigiously, worms grew in his flesh and when he was in such a condition that barely the places could be distinguished where his eyes had been, he attempted to kill himself with a knife, and was prevented only by his cousin. Behold again that hidden, wonderful power in Christ's kingdom: Jesus, the infant Child, living, Herod, the mighty persecutor, dead. So it has been unto this day. Christ, and with Him the Church, abides, but the enemies and persecutors perish.

Why was this sorrowful occurrence comprised in the plan of redemption? and why is it written? The object is clear. Man had fled from God, and Christ came to restore man again to communion with God. He suffered ignoble flight that we should no more be obliged to flee from the countenance of His Father. Out of His humble fleeing grows our approach to the throne of glory.

This clearly illustrates the nature of Christ's kingdom. It is a kingdom of the cross, but by the cross, and under the cross it triumphs with everlasting victory. In Revelations 7th chapter we read that John saw "a great multitude, which no man could number, before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands," and it was said unto him: "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and

night in his temple." They came out of great tribulation, but they had the palms of everlasting victory in their hands. Christ's kingdom is a kingdom whose citizens are led from cross to glory, from labor to rest, from defeat to victory, from death to life.

Because this is the nature of Christ's kingdom, we should gird our loins and prepare our hearts to be true and loyal citizens in His kingdom. Never should we expect worldly gain from following Christ, remembering what He said to Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world." We cannot expect to be carried to heaven on downy beds of ease; for Christ said: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me." Matt. 16, 24. We must not hope to avoid the enmity of the wicked, or the scorn of the world; for Christ was hated and obliged to flee, and He warningly says: "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets." Luke 6, 26.

But when we must bear the cross, suffer affliction, feel the enmity of the world and the scorn of the wicked, our hearts should be cheerful and we should never despair. The kingdom of Christ, though it appear to be made an end of, has never yet been overthrown, neither will it ever be. When affliction threatens to overwhelm us, we should call to mind that those standing before the throne of God came out of great tribulation, but now hold palms in their hands, as Christ also suffered, and by suffering entered in to His glory. Our hearts should be settled in the words of Paul: "We are cast down, but not destroyed." 2 Cor. 4, 9. The Lord may suffer His own to be cast down, but He will not suffer them to be destroyed. When it appears as though our enemies must prevail, and we must perish, we should not falter. If men seek to do evil unto us we know that, under the providence of God, they are only working for our good; as the Scripture saith: "We know that all things work together for good, to them that love God." Rom. 8, 28.

Very pertinently does Dr. Luther write: "The example of these innocent babes is written to teach Christians, when they suffer they should not suffer as murderers, thieves, adulterers,

or as busybodies in other men's matters, 1 Pet. 4, 15; for such sins should not be found among Christians. They are to fear God and are to avoid giving any offense. And yet the world shall assail them and shall not let them alone, so that their sufferings are like unto the sufferings of these innocent babes, who certainly had not deserved such a death at the hands of Herod, but had to suffer it alone on account of the child Jesus. So are we to suffer; then we have the comfort that Christ suffers with us, as He said to Saul, Acts 9, 4: 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?' Then it must needs follow: either bodily help must come to us, or the tyrants cause us the sooner to be delivered from this evil world and to come to Christ, our Lord and Savior."

Whatever may betide, we should follow Christ cheerfully knowing that His kingdom on earth is a kingdom of the cross, but He has an everlasting kingdom of glory in heaven in store for us, and if we suffer with Him we shall also reign with Him.

Here through scorn and frown,
There the glorious crown;
Here in hoping and believing,
There in seeing and receiving;
After scorn and frown
Comes the glorious crown. Amen.

EPIPHANY.

TEXT: Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshiped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way. Matt. 2, 1-12.

From time immemorial both the genius and the superstition of man have been occupied with the stars of heaven. This can not appear strange to us. In a still, clear night the canopy of the firmament displays a scene grand in its immensity and of surpassing beauty. When we step out into the open air on a starlit night the eye is attracted upwards, and admiring their beauty we wonder, what the stars are, how many there are, by what laws they hold their station, perform their revolutions, and the like. Hence when the people were scattered over the face of the earth after the confusion of languages at Babel, and many of the nations lost the knowledge of the true God, the heavenly bodies became one of the first objects of their super-

stitious adoration, and to these they began to ascribe those powers and influences which belong to the Deity alone. The science of astronomy also was fostered very early among some of the ancient nations, and in fact much of what we now know of the constellations and revolutions of the heavenly bodies we owe to the observations and the researches of men who lived thousands of years ago.

Because the heathen worshiped the heavenly bodies as gods the science of astronomy degenerated with them into the superstition of astrology. The heathen believed that this earth with its plants and productions is governed by the stars in their various signs and constellations, and to these they in particular ascribed a controlling influence over the life of man both in his good and evil fortunes. So much were many of the heathen nations given to this superstition that in all their undertakings and doings they would first inquire after the sign and constellation, and these they regarded either as good or evil omens. It is to be deplored that so much of this heathenish superstition is still lingering in lands which have been Christianized for centuries. To plant, to sow, to harvest, to travel, to wed by signs, to fasten a horseshoe over the door for good luck, and a score of other things, belong to heathenish idolatry and not to Christianity. We Christians are to walk in the fear of the Lord, and not by signs. Our lives and actions are to be governed by the Word of God, and not by the stars.

But the abuse of a thing will not annul the right use of it. The firmament of the heavens with its myriads of stars does certainly preach a powerful sermon to us. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork," says the 19th Psalm. The stars with a silent, but a powerful voice proclaim the creative power, skill and goodness of God. In their countless multitude the stars are made a special comfort to the church. Leading Abraham, the father of the faithful, out of his tent in a starlit night God the Lord said unto him: "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them," and then God promised him: "So shall thy seed be." Gen. 15, 5. As the stars are a countless

multitude which no man can number, even so those who have stood and who do stand in the faith of Abraham, and these are his true, spiritual seed. In the stars the Lord also gives signs which presage His coming to judgment and which are to serve for the warning of the wicked and the comfort of the pious; for He said: "And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars." Luke 21, 25. Extraordinary phenomena in the starry skies are to remind us that the Lord is coming to destroy this present earth and to create new heavens and a new earth. In another passage the stars are made an emblem of the reward for patient and prolonged labor in the Lord's service; for thus Daniel 12, 3, writes: "They that be wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." But of all Scripture passages in which the stars are mentioned those are the most lovely and comforting in which our Lord Jesus Christ is compared with, or is directly called a star. Hence allow me to speak of:

THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM,

setting forth

- I. Who and what is meant by this Star; and
- II. How we should make it the hope and compass of our lives.

I.

This Gospel narrates an occurrence which was not pleasing to the Jews, but which is specially comforting to us who are descendants of Japhet. It is the coming of the first Gentiles to worship Jesus. Who and what these men were is a matter of secondary importance. The main truth contained in this text is that Jesus is born a Savior not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles. The scribes and Pharisees taught that the Messiah would be the Savior of the Jews only and not of the Gentiles. They thought, only by becoming Jews could the Gentiles obtain part in the Messiah. This error was refuted early in the very infancy of Jesus; for God Himself led those Gentiles to Jesus, and spake to them in a vision, and so acknowledged

them His own. And the text does not say that the wise men were circumcised and became Jews, but as they had come, so they departed again to their own country. Their coming was a strong testimony for this blessed truth, that unto this Jesus should the gathering of the Gentiles be, the more so because they were led to Him so wonderfully by a star, showing that He is the Star of hope for all nations.

Who is the Star of Bethlehem? It is none other than Jesus Christ Himself; He is the true Star of Bethlehem. In Him is fulfilled the prophecy spoken by Balaam, saying: "I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel." Num. 24, 17. This Star out of Jacob arose when Jesus was born at Bethlehem, and that none other than Jesus Himself is this Star is clear from Balaam's prophecy; for he explained himself when adding: "Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion." This Star is He of whom the Old Testament so often declared that He would have dominion in the earth, a world-wide and an everlasting kingdom, and this the Lord Himself confirms at the end of the book of Revelations saying: "I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and offspring of David, and the bright and morning star." The true Star of Bethlehem is Jesus Himself.

Therefore He very properly revealed the fact of His birth to the wise men of the East by the appearing of a star. There have been various conjectures concerning this star. Some have said that it was the Holy Ghost in the form of a star; others that it was a bright and shining angel leading those men; others that it was the light shining over the shepherds of Bethlehem, supposing that this light had been visible in that far away land. These and similar things are conjectures which have no sure foundation in the text; for the wise men distinctly say: "*We have seen his star in the east.*" It was a star, yet not one of the planets or of the fixed stars; for after shining a while it disappeared and only on the way from Jerusalem to Bethlehem it appeared again and went before them and stood still

over the place where the child Jesus was. We will not deviate from the Scriptures, if we regard it a star which God caused to appear for the special purpose of leading those men to Jesus.

But how could those men know by this star that the promised King of the Jews was born? Some have supposed that these men came from Arabia, the same country whence came the queen of Sheba, and that the aforementioned prophecy of Balaam had been preserved in that country. Others have supposed that these men came from Babylon, to which city the word "magi" would seem to point as their home. There Daniel had lived and prophesied, and he and his prophecies were no doubt remembered a long time at Babylon. When Daniel had interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream the king "made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon." It is likely that the teachings of Daniel, who was one of their greatest and wisest men, were preserved in that school of learned men and they might have had prophecies uttered by Daniel which are not recorded in the Sacred Volume. These things are more or less probable suppositions, and I have mentioned them the more to emphasize the facts given in the text. The text does not say from which country these men were, neither does it tell, how they could know by this star that Jesus was born, but it does say that this star was the means by which it was made known unto them that the promise given to the Jews was now fulfilled. This star was the agency by which they were brought to Judea. God dealt with those men through means, although in their case through extraordinary means.

May we too expect to be led to Jesus by some specious means, by dreams, by visions, by peculiar sensations and the like? We have no promise that God will deal with us in that way, and if we expect it we are expecting God to do for us what He has not promised us. Those wise men from the East were led by a star, but God has nowhere promised that we too should be so led. Neither should we overlook for what purpose that star served those men. It did not lead them directly to Bethlehem

where Jesus was, but the appearing of this star only gave them occasion to travel to Judea, the land in which dwelt the people possessing the written oracles of God. Arriving in this land they directed their steps to Jerusalem, its capital city. Why did God so dispose that those men had to travel this round-about way? What did they find at Jerusalem?

O in that city they found a most valuable treasure, even the written Word of God. This Word was proclaimed to them by hypocrites, it was communicated to them by that bloodthirsty tyrant, Herod, but it was nevertheless the Word of God, and having the sure Word of prophecy they had a solid and immutable foundation on which to rest their faith. This Word gave them the assurance and certainty that they had not been deceived or misled. It is to be assumed that those men were already acquainted, more or less, with the promises given to Israel, but at Jerusalem they found that particular Word in which the birthplace of the Savior was named, and in this Word they now had the infallible certainty that the star by which they were led was not a false guide.

Though God does now no more use such wonderful means, yet He still so deals with men as to cause them to inquire after and to give ear to His Word. One is laid on a bed of sickness, another is stricken with poverty, another must mourn the loss of loved ones, another is saved from death or great misfortune by a peculiar intervention of providence, and by these things God strives to draw men to Christ and His Word. I knew a man who was well to do in Europe, but he immigrated to this country, and here he was poor and had to work hard for a scanty living, yet he thanked God for it and pronounced his immigration his best fortune, because here he found the true Gospel preaching, by which he obtained the living assurance of his soul's salvation. His immigration was his earthly loss, but his heavenly gain, because by it he was brought to a place where he could hear the true Gospel preaching. God will lead men wonderfully, yet His guidances are not in themselves means of conversion and salvation; good and evil fortunes are only agencies which God uses to direct men to that one thing by which

alone the saving knowledge of Christ is obtained, the Word of the Gospel. St. Peter gives testimony unto this and says: "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts." 2 Pet. 1, 19. Why is the Gospel called a light? Certainly because the Star of Bethlehem shines in it. Jesus Christ is the sun and centre of the Scriptures. The Gospel preaches Christ and every one who, in singleness of mind, gives heed to the Gospel will realize the truth of His promise when He says: "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." John 8, 12. Therefore we who have the Gospel should certainly not be idle, but we should imitate the wise men from the East. What did they do?

II.

When the wise men had learned by the appearing of the star that the promised Savior was born, it was soon settled with them to go and to seek Him. This could certainly bring them no earthly gain, but it must rather have brought them earthly loss. Whatever their occupation may have been it had to be interrupted for a long journey and this journey itself was by no means a pleasure trip, because it must have taken them through desert lands where dangers and hardships beset them. To those men the one important thing was to seek and to find Christ. Even so should it be with us. The one thing needful, the one thing of paramount importance to us should be to seek Christ and to be found in Him. We need not travel to a foreign land to find Christ. St. Paul writes: "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith which we preach." Rom. 10, 8. In the Word of the cross Christ is preached unto us and we have the Book of His testimonies lying on the mantelpiece. Seeing we are favored so greatly, should it not be our favorite occupation to read the Word of Christ, to ponder it in the heart and to become the longer the more intimate with Jesus? Was there ever a time when the

Book of God was placed within the reach of every one as it is now? In our days the very poorest can possess a Bible, and when the Word of life is made so plentiful, should we then not improve our opportunities for the benefit of the soul? We can go to the house of God every Lord's day, and the Bible invites us to read every morning and night, and if the Star of Bethlehem is not shining in our hearts it is owing alone to our own willful neglect and we are left without excuse.

But in this text a sad fact is recorded which is found but too true at this day also. Those men from the East traveled for days across the desert and their strong desire to find the Lord helped them cheerfully to endure all hardships and to brave all dangers. Surely, their hearts must have thrilled with joy when they reached the land of Judah, that chosen land of God's own chosen people. They went into this land, but no sign of an extraordinary event could be seen. They went to Jerusalem, but there was no display of festive joy. They inquired for the new-born King of the Jews, but the inhabitants of Jerusalem looked at them with surprise, because they had heard nothing of the birth of a prince. They insisted that the promised King was certainly born, because they had seen His star in the East, and now Jerusalem began to feel alarmed. Perhaps they applied to king Herod, perhaps he heard of these strangers and drew them to his court. He was anxious in this matter, because he feared for His throne. Hence he quickly made inquiry of those versed in the Scriptures and though with guile in his heart he told the wise men what Micah had prophesied. Yet even now, when the attention of the chief of the people was directed to the fulfilling of this prophecy in such a remarkable manner, not one of them made a move to accompany the wise men down to Bethlehem. They had to go alone. For centuries the Jewish nation had been looking and waiting for this their promised King and now the news of His birth seemed evil tidings to them. Why? O Herod, the Edomite, was king, and they thought to dethrone him would cause tumults and commotions, and they did not want to be disturbed in their money making and pleasure seeking. Must not the indifference and the earthly

mindfulness which they observed at Jerusalem have been a sore trial to the faith of those strangers from the far East? But they stood the test. When the Jews would not go to worship their King those strangers went alone.

We live in a land which is called Christian, but how many of its inhabitants are there, whose first love is Jesus Christ, whose highest aim is to be found in Him? Surely, they are a minority, not to say a remnant only. The great majority is given to money making and pleasure seeking. And this often becomes a cause of temptation to the Christian. The devil will suggest that he is foolish in not thinking, and living as others do, and his own flesh will draw the Christian to fall in line with those who are traveling the broad way. Let us therefore well note the example of these wise men. When the inhabitants of Jerusalem would not go with them they went alone. If others will not go with us to seek and to follow Jesus let us go alone. If father, mother, sister, brother, husband, wife will not go with thee, go alone, and make haste to secure the salvation of thy soul. Here is the Word of the Lord proclaiming this great and glorious fact: The long promised King of the Jews is born and He is thy Savior. Let thy soul flee from the land of destruction and find salvation with this King, and let it not hinder thee, if the multitude go not with thee. Yea, if even those dearest to thy heart will not go with thee, go thou alone. "Let us now go," said the shepherds, after the angel had spoken unto them, "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us." Amen.

1. SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

TEXT: Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. Luke 2, 41-52.

“The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.” These words the Lord spake after the deluge, when He smelled the sweet savor of Noah's burnt-offering. Man is of a corrupt nature, and hence it necessarily follows that “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually.” Gen. 6, 5. This corruption which is in the nature of man naturally begins to exert itself early in his very infancy. To this Solomon bears witness, saying: “Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child,” and of himself and the Ephesians St. Paul says: We were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.” This is the testimony which God Himself bears concerning the childhood and youth of man, and its truth is attested by the experience of all ages. Excepting our Lord Jesus Christ there was never a child born upon this earth whose heart was not prone to all manner of evil. Where is the mother who does

not know that a child is inclined to do just that very thing which it is forbidden to do? If not that which is good is early implanted into the heart nothing will grow in it save only the weeds of wickedness and vice. How some can assert that children are innocent and have no sin is hard to understand. Infants are indeed innocent in comparison to grown up sinners, but to say that they are without sin is contrary to the declaration of the Lord: "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh," and what it brings forth will self-evidently be on the same order. "The child is a chip of the old block," and in youth the evil propensities of nature are peculiarly active.

By the grace of God there have been many who were pious and virtuous in their youth, as we see in Joseph, Daniel, Timothy, the virgin Mary and many others. And there are still many young people of praiseworthy piety and virtue, but their piety is not of natural growth. They are made pious by a godly education and the work of the Holy Ghost in the heart. On the other hand we have numerous examples of great men of God who had to regret the sins of their youth with bitter tears. When David, the man after the heart of God, looked back to his youthful days he was constrained to sigh: "Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions." Ps. 25, 7. Job, whose piety the Scriptures laud so highly, in the days of his affliction said: "Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth." Job 13, 26. St. Augustine, one of the greatest divines the church ever had, could think of his youth only with tears of remorse and shame. But why multiply examples? Is it not a fact that many of the most God fearing Christians must lament over some grievous sin committed in their younger years, or must even sorrow over an entirely misspent and lost youth? Legion is the name of those who must sink into an early grave covered with disgrace, or must carry bodily sufferings unto old age, because of missteps made in their youth.

Never was the truth of this word: "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth," more patent than in our times. Newspapers and statistical tables demonstrate this to

an evidence. Not only is impurity, stubbornness against parents and superiors and other sins daily on the increase, the number even of heinous crimes perpetrated by mere striplings is continually growing. It is no more an unheard of or even a rare thing that murders and burglaries are committed by boys. Yea verily, the heart of man is evil from his youth, and Paul prophesied truthfully when he described the generations of "the last days" as being "proud, disobedient to parents, unthankful, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God." 2 Tim. 3, 1.

Woe, therefore, would be unto all men, if there were not a Savior of youth. But thanks be to God that our Lord Jesus Christ is a Savior not of the old only, but also of the young. Our to-day's Gospel speaks to us of our youthful Savior, and it pictures Him in colors which may well delight our eyes and console our hearts. Let us see what this text tells us of

THE HOLY CHILDHOOD OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

Permit me to state:

- I. In what His holiness consisted; and
- II. What salutary use we should make of it.

I.

Our Lord Jesus Christ possesses a threefold holiness or righteousness. He possesses the essential holiness of His divine nature, which He has in common with the Father and the Holy Ghost. As the true God He is holy in His nature from eternity to eternity; yea, He is even holiness itself. Secondly, He possesses the perfect holiness of His human nature. Conceived by the Holy Ghost He was born without sin, and He never did sin, neither was guile found in His mouth. Thirdly, He possesses that holiness or righteousness which He earned as mediator between God and men by His holy obedience, His bitter suffering and His innocent death. These are the three kinds of holiness which Christ possesses. The two first, the essential holiness of His divine and the essential perfection of His human nature—, He has and keeps for Himself eternally, but His

merited holiness He has not for Himself. This holiness He has for us; for He did not live, suffer and die for His own sake, but for our sake. He was not under any necessity whatsoever to acquire or earn holiness for Himself, because He was already holy both in His divine and in His human nature. This holiness which He won by His active and passive obedience He purchased as our representative for us and He gives it unto us freely. Now when I here speak of the holiness of Christ's childhood and youth I do not mean the essential holiness of His divinity, nor do I mean the essential perfection of His humanity, but I am speaking of that holiness or righteousness which He, as our substitute, obtained for us, and the acquiring of which He commenced in His infancy and youth by His holy life and walk.

Jesus walked in holiness toward God, toward men and toward Himself. Above all things He walked holy and unblamable toward His Father in heaven. This is evidenced by two things which we are told of Him in this text. It tells us that He walked in the obedience of the law. *"Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem."* In the law of Moses it was commanded unto Israel: "Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles." Deut. 16, 16. Those Jews dwelling at a great distance from Jerusalem were permitted to celebrate the two last named festivals at home, but at the Passover, or Easter, all males twelve years old and over were bound by the law to appear before the Lord in His sanctuary. This command of the ceremonial law was invariably observed by Jesus. Indeed it seems that He accompanied His parents every year, even before He was twelve years old; for the text says, that Joseph and Mary went up to Jerusalem every year and that, when He was twelve years old, the child Jesus tarried behind at Jeru-

salem. This would seem to indicate that He had accompanied His parents before. In all cases the instance recorded here shows that Jesus punctually observed the law from His childhood. He was the Giver of the ceremonial law, its Lord and not its subject, but He voluntarily put Himself under the law "to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Gal. 4, 5. He went to Jerusalem regularly at the feast of the Passover, because He was that true Lamb of the Passover which was to be sacrificed for the sins of the world.

But Jesus did not only walk in the obedience of the ceremonial law. Outwardly the Pharisees also observed the rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic law, although they understood not their true meaning. Jesus did more. He walked in all the holiness of the moral or natural law which was binding not on the Jews only, but on all the nations of the earth. He did what none other can do, He loved God above all things with all His heart. This is here instanced by His tarrying at Jerusalem without the knowledge of His parents. It was the will of His Father in heaven that He should be in the temple just at that time, and then and there should show forth the first rays of His divine glory for a testimony to the elders and rulers of the people, and when it came to doing the will of His Father which had sent Him He had no more any regard of men, not even of His parents. When His mother complained of the anxiety with which they had been obliged to seek Him, He rebuked them, saying: "*How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?*" He declared to His mother, she ought to have known that He must be about the work which His heavenly Father had given Him to do, and if she had remembered this she would not have needed to be in anxiety about Him, neither could she have entertained the thought that He had dealt unkindly with her. Some one might here raise the question: Why did Jesus stay at Jerusalem without the knowledge of His mother? Why did He not tell her beforehand, what He was about to do? I simply answer: This I do not know, nor does it concern me. There may have been

many reasons for it. Perhaps it was so done, because He, as a priest after the order of Melchizedek, was to appear in the temple without father and without mother. In short, so it was the will of His Father and so He did, and it was strictly in accordance with the law. In his final blessing of the people Moses says of a true Levite: "Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him, neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant. They shall teach Jacob thy judgments and Israel thy law." Deut. 33, 9. In the performing of the office unto which He was sent Jesus could have regard of no man; for no man could help Him in it. He had to do it alone and He gave Himself wholly to it, as He later on said to His disciples: "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." John 4, 34.

As Jesus walked in immaculate holiness toward God, so also in untarnished virtue toward men. He had no pleasure in the vanities which the young generally follow after. When Joseph and Mary found Him they did not find Him in a tavern, or in a theater, or on the street in bad company, or lounging idly at a corner; they found Him in the temple, where the God fearing and the pious were to be found. We must not imagine that Jerusalem contained no places for worldly enjoyments. The inducements to sinful pleasures were just as seductive in Jerusalem as in other cities; but Jesus was found in the temple. In His childhood and youth He never did anything by which any one could have been offended, or for which He might have been justly rebuked. Twenty years later He challenged the Jews publicly in the temple, the place where the people congregated from all parts of the country, to bring a charge against Him saying: "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" John 8, 46. Saying this He needed not to fear that some one might step forth and say, at such a time and place he had heard or had seen Jesus speak or do evil. When He preached at Nazareth, where He had lived till to His thirtieth year, His former acquaintances and neighbors thrust Him out of the city, because they could not bear His doctrine, but they could bring no

charge against Him, excepting that He was a carpenter's son, and this was certainly not a sin. He never did anything in His juvenile years which even His bitterest enemies could have reprehended in Him.

Walking unblamably Jesus walked in all gracefulness and loveliness. When He was yet young in years the words of the 45th Psalm were already fulfilled in Him, saying: "Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips." This passage will help us to account for what is here said of Joseph and Mary: "*They, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.*" His parents could not only depend on it that Jesus would do nothing amiss, they also knew that, with acquaintances, He would be well cared for, because He was beloved by all on account of His exemplary behavior. Towards His parents He was humble and obedient; for the text says: "*And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them.*" He gave them the honor due unto parents and He obeyed their commands most willingly. In this connection we should not overlook that Joseph and Mary were poor, making a living by the labor of their hands, and doubtless Jesus had to help earn their support. This much we know from the Scriptures that He worked at the carpenter trade; for when He once preached at Nazareth the people asked: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?" Mark 6, 3. As His conduct towards all was lovely, so in particular toward His parents He performed all the duties of a son in the full sense of the word, and so He fulfilled the righteousness of the fourth commandment.

Finally we here read of Him: "*And Jesus increased in wisdom, and stature, and in favor with God and man.*" This is said according to His human nature; for as the true God He possessed all wisdom from the very first moment of His conception, but in His human nature He humbled Himself for our sake, and hence He increased like other children. Here a mystery is touched on which is inscrutable to our understanding, the union of the divine and human natures in Christ. It is the

same One who possesses all wisdom and yet increases in wisdom. These words therefore show that in His youth Jesus was by no means idle, but He diligently applied Himself to increase in wisdom and all those things which are pleasing and comely before God and men.

Jesus Christ so walked in His childhood and youth that neither God, nor any man, friend or foe, nor He Himself could find any sin, fault or neglect in all His life and doings. A perfect youth without blemish. And now let us consider of what benefit the holiness of Christ's youth is unto us, and what use we should make of it.

II.

The right use and application of Christ's holiness in His youth is threefold: It is to be unto us a mirror, a consolation and an ensample.

From the holiness of His youth we should learn to see the unholiness of our own youth. We Christians are not to look at sin as the children of the world do, who count sin a small matter and say that the excesses of youthful days are excusable. Before God no sin is excusable, He simply makes the demand: "Ye shall be holy," and this concerns the young as well as the old. Were you a holy child? Did you walk blamelessly in the law as Jesus did? Did you never delight in sinful things? Did you please and never displease your father and mother? Did you diligently apply your youthful years to increase in wisdom and all that is pleasing with God and men? Look for the answer to these questions in your bygone years and see, whether you can proudly lift up the head and say: I have nothing to accuse myself of? To the old Adam the asking of such questions is not pleasant, but it is profitable for the heart and soul and we Christians must never want to deal too gently with the young man Absalom. Seeking excuses and trying to whitewash ourselves is not the right way; we must be humble, upright and always giving honor to the truth, and surely, if we compare our youth with that of Jesus Christ, there is not one of us who has not much reason to pray: "Remember not the

sins of my youth, nor my transgressions," though we had been ever so dutiful and virtuous sons and daughters. If God, from whom nothing is hid, begins to ask questions concerning our youth, we are verily not able to answer Him one in a thousand.

But this text reminds us of this great comfort that by Christ's holy youth we are saved from our sinful youth. Commonly we think of Christ's passive obedience much sooner than of His active obedience. Remembering our redemption we are apt to think only of Christ's suffering and death, and are not so apt to remember His active obedience that He fulfilled all righteousness by walking in the law, and so we often overlook one great source of comfort to the soul. We are redeemed by the doing, as well as by the suffering of Christ. In order to redeem us it was necessary for Him both to suffer the punishment for the sins which we have committed, and to supply the good which we have omitted. He had to do that which we ought to have done and did not do. In His youth He had to supply the good which we ought to have done in our youth, but which we failed to do.

That the holy walk of Christ in His youth is a part of His work of redemption admits of no doubt; for all that He did on earth He did for us. He also plainly intimates it here by the word "*must*" when He says: "*Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?*" The business unto which the Father had sent Him was our redemption and of this business He said when He was twelve years old that He must be about it. Later on He said to John the Baptist: "It becometh us to fulfill all righteousness," which includes the righteousness of youth. When still a boy He was laboring in the work of our redemption, and He was laboring in it by His holy walk in the law. He kept in our stead what we had not kept; what we neglected He supplied.

This is the use which we are to make of Christ's holy youth: we are to appropriate it and make it our own, and bringing it before the throne of the Father we should say: Lord, my God, in my youth I was not as I ought to have been. I fell far short of that righteousness which Thy law demanded of me, and

justly couldst Thou condemn me for the sins of my youth. But I appeal to the work of Thy Son, my substitute. He fulfilled all righteousness for me, His youthful holiness is mine and for His sake Thou wilt not remember the shortcomings of my youth.

Dressing our souls in His righteousness by faith we should strive to follow the ensample which He has left unto us. It was about fifty miles from Nazareth to Jerusalem, but Jesus was never missing at the festival of the Passover. He went to the temple. He inquired of the teachers in the temple and gave answers to their questions. When twelve years old, His whole mind was intent on performing the work unto which He was sent. "*Wist ye not,*" He says, "*that I must be about my Father's business?*" He was subject to His parents, and the last verse of our text says of Him: "*And Jesus increased in wisdom, and stature, and in favor with God and man.*"

Here, my young friends, you have an example to follow. Walk in the footsteps of your youthful Savior. Now, while you are young, is the *right time* to follow Him. Only this one point let me to-day urge upon you. It is a very common idea that youth is the time to enjoy one's self, and that the right time to become pious and to serve God is the latter part of life. That is an idea invented by the devil, and it is continually populating hell with thousands and thousands of souls. But you will say: Is there not a truth in it? I answer: To deceive souls the devil always mixes together truth and falsehood. There is a grain of truth in that idea. It is true that youth is the time to be joyous. "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth," says Solomon, but he adds: "Know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." Eccl. 11, 9. Youth is the right time to rejoice, but with innocent and not with carnal and sinful joy. It is true, a young man or maiden should not go about hanging the head and groaning all the day long. But if there is some truth in the first part of that saying, the latter part, that old age is the right time to become pious, is altogether false. In old age every one should be pious, but old age is not the *right time* to become pious. On the contrary,

youth is the right time to become pious. To make the saying right you must put it thus: Youth is the right time to be joyous, and youth is the right time to be pious. Both should go together. The *right time* to graft a tree is not when it is become old and the limbs are already dying. Grafts very rarely do well on an old stump of a tree. The *right time* to graft a tree is when it is young; then it may grow lustily, and become a tree rooted in the soil, strong and healthy. In your infancy the spiritual man was engrafted in you by the Holy Ghost through baptism. Should you tear out those grafts and throw them away? Or should you suffer them to die from neglect? Foster those good grafts that from year to year they may grow stronger and become a tree able to withstand the storms of life. In youth walk in the footprints of your youthful Savior, then you will be prepared in old age to walk in the footprints of your patiently suffering and triumphantly victorious Savior.

“Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.” Ps. 119, 1. Amen.

II. SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there. And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage. And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it. And there were set there six water-pots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, fill the water-pots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it. When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was, (but the servants which drew the water knew,) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, and saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him. John 2, 1-11.

When God, after the six days work of creation, "saw every thing that he had made, it was very good," but sin entered into the world, spoiled the creation of God, and now the world is a vale of tears and full of evil. Yet the creatures of God have not become evil in themselves. Man only became a sinner, other creatures became subject to vanity, but there is no sin in them, as St. Paul writes: "Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." 1 Tim. 4, 5. In these words St. Paul does not contradict Moses who says that God cursed the earth; for God did not in its own nature make that evil which before He had made good, but to man and on account of man the earth is cursed. Though the creature is no more so precious as it was before the fall, yet the greater evil is that man does no more receive the creature with thanksgiving, does not regard it according to the Word of God and

does not sanctify it by prayer. This is one of the greatest evils under the sun, that man does not regard the works, doings and ordinances of God according to His Word; for if man receives and uses the creatures of God according to God's Word, then that which was cursed on account of sin again becomes to him a blessing which brings true and genuine joy.

An evil of evils it surely is, if man does not look at things right, as he ought to. If I, a minister of the Gospel, look at my office through the spectacles of the flesh, or the old Adam, I can see nothing in it but labor and trouble and humiliation; but if I look at my calling according to the Word of God, in the light of God's promises, then it is, as it were, surrounded by a halo; then it shows in colors which make it something desirable and lovely, and if I could *always* and *only* regard it in this light I would truly be a happy man. Similar it is in all things. If a man would look at everything in the light of God's Word, and would receive it with thanksgiving, that would heighten every joy, lighten every burden, sweeten every cross and, notwithstanding its multitude of evils, to that man this earth would be half a paradise.

So it is also with the holy estate of matrimony. With many unhappy husbands and wives the chief fault is that they do not look at the estate of wedlock in the right way. If husband and wife do not see their estate in the light of God's Word, but have regard only of their own wishes and notions, the result is that they overlook the blessings which they enjoy, and see only the evils; yea, often regard that a curse which in fact is a blessing, and so they make themselves unhappy, when they might live contented and happy. If all husbands and wives would say with Joshua 24, 15: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," serve Him in all things, serve Him in days good and evil, serve Him according to His Word, this must surely bring true and lasting happiness to every house; for "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." 1 Tim. 4, 8. Diligently therefore should we give heed to the words of Mary, saying:

“WHATSOEVER HE SAITH UNTO YOU, DO IT,” AS AN
EARNEST EXHORTATION TO THOSE WHO ENTER
AND THOSE WHO LIVE IN WEDLOCK.

I. So enter the estate of matrimony that you can cheerfully invite Jesus to your wedding.

II. So live in wedlock that Jesus can sit at your fireside.

I.

Among the many subjects for a discourse which this Gospel offers let me to-day speak from the words of Mary to the servants: “*Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.*” She directed the servants to do, whatever Jesus would tell them, no matter how strange it might appear. What Jesus says we are to do, however useless and unreasonable it may appear. This rule holds good in all things. He is the Lord, we are the servants. It is for Him to command and for us to obey.

What has Jesus to say to those who intend to enter the estate of wedlock? We read here: “*And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there. And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage.*” This couple evidently regarded the day of their marriage an important day and they made it a festive occasion. None should think lightly of marriage; all, both the married and the unmarried, should count it a sacred state. Getting married on mountain tops, on bridges, on railroad trains, or in other fantastic situations, is not in keeping with the sacredness of wedlock. Marriages should always be performed in a solemn manner as a solemn matter. God Himself has highly honored wedlock, as we know from His Word. Before the institution of matrimony God took counsel with Himself, similar as He had done before the creation of man. God Himself brought the woman to man; God Himself pronounced the blessing upon them, and added: “*Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife.*” And all this God did before the fall, in paradise, when man was yet in the state of holiness and perfection.

After the fall of man God has highly honored matrimony

by guarding and protecting it in a special command of His law, saying: "Thou shalt not commit adultery;" and by threatening: "I will be a swift witness against the adulterers." And God has at all times proved Himself a swift witness against the transgressors of this commandment, as the destruction of Sodom and so many other examples show. God has also preserved this estate at all times and among all nations. On the whole face of the earth there is not a nation without this institution; it is found amongst the most savage tribes. Highly did Jesus Christ, the Son of God, honor this estate by making the beginning of His miracles at a wedding. When He was about to enter on the public exercise of His office and wanted to begin to manifest forth His glory, He went not to the temple, not to the kingly palace, He went to the wedding of a poor and humble couple and there He performed His first miracle. By this action He sanctioned the estate of matrimony and honored it above all other estates. "Marriage is honorable in all." Heb. 13, 4. Think not lightly of it, but count it honorable and sacred.

The couple in our text invited Jesus to their marriage. There, my young friends, is another thing which Jesus wants you to do. He wants you to invite Him to your wedding. You can of course not invite Him in the same manner as that couple at Cana did, but you can nevertheless invite Him, and if you do invite Him, He will be sure to be there and His blessing with Him. Jesus will not intrude Himself on you if you do not want Him at your wedding, He wants to be invited, but when He is asked He does not stand on ceremonies, He comes; for He has said: "Ask, and it shall be given you." Remember that it is a matter of vast consequence, whether you invite Jesus or not. "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." Ps. 127, 1. His blessing will build your house and He will make it a place of true happiness. Let Jesus be the prime guest at your wedding.

When by the Word the Lord is Guest,
And all through faith and prayer is blest,
There with God's grace will all be filled,
And God Himself that house will build.

And asking Jesus you should not put off till the morning of your wedding day. It should be done earlier. Young people are inclined to regard marrying a light thing and they are apt to forget or overlook the fact that there is a very serious feature about it. The bond binds for lifetime, and whether you will be happy or unhappy in this world depends largely on the companion of your life. Therefore before choosing a life's companion you should ask God to guide you by His counsel and should give you the spouse of His choice. When Eliezer was sent by Abraham to win a bride for his son he fervently prayed the Lord to show him the damsel whom He had appointed for Isaac, and when Eliezer's prayer was quickly and manifestly answered he returned thanks unto God and said: "I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren." Gen. 24, 27. Do likewise. Before choosing turn in fervent prayer to God. If you do like the people before the flood, of whom it is written: "They took them wives of all which they chose," if you choose only after the lust of your own eyes without God and without prayer, and your wedded life turns out unhappy, then your conscience will convict you that it is a just punishment for your forgetting God; but if you enter on an engagement with fervent prayer in the fear of the Lord, and in after years affliction comes to your house you will have the goodly comfort that this is certainly so the counsel of God over you and must be for your good.

From our text we can pretty safely conclude that this couple, or one of them, was of kin to the virgin Mary, or that there was some connection between the families. There is another point to be considered in advance. The Bible forbids the marriage of relatives to the third link of kinship, as we read Leviticus 18th chapter. This rule forbids the marrying of one's step daughter or one's sister in law, being in the sense of the Bible the third link of kinship. Though not forbidden in the Bible the marriage of first cousins does not appear advisable, and in some States it is prohibited by civil law which Christian citizens should always obey. In the Old Testament the Jews were strictly forbidden to intermarry with the heathen, as the con-

cluding chapters of the book of Ezra so forcibly show. In the New Testament marriage between those of different religions, or church connections, is not forbidden expressly in so many words, but whether it is advisable is a very different question. Experience abundantly shows that difference in religion very frequently becomes a source of discord between husband and wife and not seldom it causes permanent estrangement of the hearts and renders the union a most unhappy one. Much less should a Christian choose an infidel for a consort. When in the first world the children of God began to intermarry with the ungodly, they too became wicked and their progeny became more wicked. It is scarcely possible for a Christian daily to sit at the same table with a scoffer and yet not to be seduced from the faith. Neither should the point of morality ever be overlooked. If a Christian lady marries a man of whom she knows that he is addicted to some vice she has no reason to complain when in after years he abuses her. If you marry a drunkard you must live with a drunkard. All these things should be considered before the engagement.

The couple in our text had been engaged and they faithfully kept their engagement. In our time and country engagements are treated altogether too lightly. Instead of regarding it permanently binding many count the engagement a time of trial and think, it might be broken off at any time, or at the option of either party. But the holy Scriptures speak of the engagement as creating the marriage bond. In the 1st chapter of Matthew Mary is called Joseph's wife and he her husband when they were only engaged. According to the Scriptures it is the mutual consent and agreement which creates the bond of wedlock and the marriage ceremony is the public confirmation of the bond which existed before already. While it is true that some things will annul an engagement for which a divorce could not be granted by the church, yet as a rule a formal and valid engagement must be counted as binding as marriage itself. This might seem a hard saying to some, but a little thinking must make it evident to every mind. Can any person be counted of a trustworthy character who, like a butter-

fly, will flit from one flower to another? If plural marriages are wrong can plural engagements be right? Could you cheerfully invite Jesus to your wedding after breaking your promise given to another, or even to two or three others? Surely, Jesus will not be the companion of promise-breakers, unless they repent.

The contracting parties in our text were not a run-away couple, or Jesus would not have honored their wedding with His presence. Their relatives and friends were there, and they came together honestly and honorably and in no disreputable manner. For a right and valid engagement the consent of the parents on both sides is required. Young people frequently think that marriage is only their own personal affair, and it did not concern father and mother, but their thinking so will not make it right. Could you cheerfully invite Jesus to your wedding when marrying without the consent or against the will of your parents? Indeed not; for Jesus will not be the guest of those who dishonor and disobey father and mother. In the Scriptures we read of one who married against the will of his parents and who blasted the happiness of his aged mother. It was Esau, in whom was no fear of God. If your parents have raised you with much labor, care and expense they are certainly worthy that you ask their counsel or their consent in choosing a spouse. Neither should a young man of integrity ever entertain the thought of inducing a lady to marry him against the will of her parents. You are not allowed to steal another man's money, much less are you allowed to steal his daughter. Wait until you can have her in such a way that you can invite Jesus to your wedding. On the other hand parents should not allow their child to keep the company of a party to whom they are opposed, because doing so is giving *silent consent*, and they have afterwards no right to complain, if it ends in a manner which is not pleasing to them.

Finally, we learn here that weddings should be celebrated in Christian decency and order. Many argue, a little excess at weddings and the like occasions, would do no harm, and to justify riotous behavior appeal is sometimes made to the words

of this text, when the ruler of the feast says: "*Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now.*" Examining carefully we soon find that these words are so far from sanctioning excess that they rather prove the very contrary, because they speak to us of the moderation practiced at Jewish weddings. With the Jews it was customary to appoint a governor of the feast whose duty it was to see to decency and order, and who had to test the quality of the wine and to determine the quantity which should be allowed the guests. At first a moderate quantity of good wine was given and then only weak or liberally watered wine, and this was done to prevent drunkenness. So this very text is a strong testimony for the decency and sobriety with which Jewish weddings were celebrated. A marriage is a proper time for joy, but excess is not joy, and it should have no place at Christian weddings.

Shall I yet speak of purity, indicated by the water-jars in the text? "Flee fornication." "Keep thyself pure." "If sinners entice thee, consent thou not." See that thou enter wedlock a chaste youth or a pure virgin. I assure you, this will be a great factor for your earthly happiness, and it will save you life-long compunctions of conscience. Seek the Lord early. Let your heart become acquainted with Him while you are young. Let Jesus always remain your first love, and so walk that with a clear conscience and a gladsome heart you can invite Him to your marriage, and rest assured, long as you may live, you will never find a reason to regret these things.

II.

"*Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it*" in your wedded life.

Because the bond binds for life the happiness of groom and bride should continue through life, and not for a few honeymoons only. You want to know: How can I preserve the happiness in my house for all time? I am happy to say that I can show you a way, a sure way, a tried way, and the way is this: Let Jesus sit at your fireside and rule in your house by His

Word. Jesus is not to be a transient guest like other wedding guests, He should be kept in the house, He should dwell in the hearts of husband and wife and He should be invited to speak to them and to their whole household every night and morning at their family worship. I say, this is a sure way of preserving happiness in wedded life. Why so? Very simply for this reason: When husband and wife discover that each loves the Lord Jesus, this becomes a new bond between them and it affords them exquisite joy to know their souls one in Christ Jesus. This mutual love of Jesus knits their hearts together more firmly than even conjugal love can. It truly makes them one heart and one soul. Their highest love is one, their innermost joy is one, their hope is one.

This mutual love of Jesus is a safeguard against discord and an estrangement of the hearts. Temporary discords and quarrels may arise in that house, but if the husband has been hard and unkind the love of Jesus will prompt him to make amends; and if the wife has been contrary, querulous or in other ways has angered the husband, the love of Jesus will not let her rest, it prompts her to acknowledge and to seek reconciliation. Where there is the mutual love of Jesus the bond between husband and wife will continually grow and when they are wrinkled and gray the bond between them will be far stronger than it was in their youth. I say, happy the house in which dwells the love of Jesus, where both husband and wife are one in faith, one in the desire to continue in the Word of Christ. O ye, my Christian brothers and sisters, if the heart of your spouse is yet void of the love of Jesus, strive by all means to plant it there. It is the noblest of mission work, and you will find your reward already in this life.

Where the mutual love of Jesus dwells cares and crosses will not be lacking. Just in Christian families these are often thickest and heaviest. But Jesus dwells there, and He has strong shoulders and is skillful in making the shoulders of the weak strong to bear burdens with ease which otherwise would crush giants. Truly does He say by the prophet: "The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned that I should

know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary." Is. 50, 4. If Jesus dwells in the house and the heart does become weary, He knows the right season, when to speak a word to the weary heart whereby it is refreshed and quieted. A Christian family has in Jesus a helper and comforter in every trouble; a helper whose help is sure, a comforter whose comfortings are lasting. This is indicated in the words: "*The mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine.*" She made the need of the young couple known unto Him to obtain help for them. She was confident He would help at the time and in the manner He knew to be best, and her confidence was not put to shame. When His time had come, He furnished wine of a superior quality, and in such quantity that it was more than sufficient for the marriage feast. And in what wonderful manner did He go about it! He says: "*Fill the water-pots with water.*" Might not the servants have said: "He must be jesting. Wine we want, and He says, bring water." But all of a sudden the water proved to be wine. It appeared as though the water must make the lack of wine the more apparent, yet it proved to be the desired help.

Where the mutual love of Jesus dwells, both husband and wife will be happy to occupy the God-ordained relation toward each other. The husband will not despise his wife, neither will he count her his servant, but he will remember that Eve was taken from Adam's side near his heart; and the wife will call her husband lord, as Sarah did Abraham, and she will not want to rule over him. This talk of the so-called emancipation of woman is a cankerworm gnawing at the very heart of society. When the woman aspires to be the man she loses those very graces which are most attractive in her and she destroys her own happiness. In Christian wedlock the wife needs and wants no emancipation. She is happy in her station, happy to make her house happy.

Invite Jesus to your wedding, and let Him not go away again. Grant Him room in the heart, room in the house, and you will find Him a Friend indeed and a Savior in need. Amen.

III. SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven: but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the self-same hour. Matt. 8, 1-13.

When that leprous man besought the Lord saying: "*If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean,*" the Lord did unto him according to his desire, answering: "*I will; be thou clean.*" Unto the centurion He likewise said: "*As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.*" Similar words the Lord used on various occasions. Touching the eyes of two blind men He said: "According to your faith be it unto you." To that Canaanite woman who stopped Him in the way by kneeling before Him, He said: "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt." David likewise says of the Lord in the 145th Psalm: "He will fulfill the desire of them that fear him." From these and many similar passages of Scripture it is evident

that God deals with man according to his faith. In the great day of the Lord every man will be judged according to the faith, the trust, the treasure of his heart, as the Lord declares: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

That God judges man not according to outward works, but according to the faith, trust and treasure of his soul is nothing remarkable; for it is the sentiment and the intent of the heart and mind which makes the outward act either good or bad. "Either," says the Lord, "make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt." Matt. 12, 33. "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things," v. 35. As the heart and mind is, so will the act be. Therefore God judges not by the act of the hand, but by the faith of the heart. Only because the outward act manifests the faith or unbelief of the heart, do the Scriptures at sundry places declare, that man will be judged according to his works.

Because God treats with man according to the faith and trust of his heart, therefore those putting their trust in that which is vain and unstable will perish, and those putting their trust in that which endureth forever will not be confounded, even as Solomon says: "The hope of the righteous shall be gladness: but the expectation of the wicked shall perish." Prov. 10, 28. The trust of the miser will perish when he finds that he can carry nothing out of this world. The trust of him relying on the friendship of men will be lost; for man is fickle and he passeth away like a shadow. Lost will be the hope of those trusting in their integrity and doing right; for they will be put to shame when they hear from the lips of the Judge: "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." Gal. 3, 10. Lost will be the hope of those pretending perfect holiness; for "there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not." Eccl. 7, 20.

Because God will judge us according to the faith of our

heart, we must make sure that we have the right faith, and that it rest not on a perishable and uncertain foundation, but on the Rock of Ages which remains to all eternity. Now in our text we have the example of a faith at which the Lord Himself marvelled. This therefore can not be an uncertain and deceptive, it must be the true faith. Let us look to

THE CENTURION AT CAPERNAUM AN ENSAMPLE FOR US,

- I. In his humility; and
- II. In his faith.

I.

This centurion was not a Jew, he was a Gentile; for he was an officer in the Roman army, and the Lord said that in Israel He had not found such great faith as his. In what the greatness of his faith was manifested is expressed in his words when he says: "*Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.*" The Lord had offered to come and heal his servant, but he confessed himself unworthy that the Lord should step under his roof, and he wanted nothing but only a word from the Lord. The first in which this man serves as an ensample to us is the consciousness and the free acknowledgment of his great unworthiness.

If man is to have that faith which justifies from sin and which brings life everlasting, his heart must have certain qualities without which the true faith can not take root in it. The man who is not sick, or who does not know and feel his sickness will always refuse medicine. The man who is not sorrowful will smile sarcastically, if another labors to comfort him. What must be in the heart before the true and saving faith can be kindled in it? Above all other things the heart must have the knowledge of sin. So long as a man does not consider himself a sinner he can not possibly believe that his sins are forgiven. Offer the forgiveness of sin to one who is not aware of having sinned, and he will repel it as something of which he is not in need. The knowledge of sin must always precede faith.

This knowledge of sin must not be a knowledge connected with carelessness, but such a knowledge which makes the heart sorrowful, downcast and humble before God on account of sin. The inhabitants of Sodom knew that they sinned, but sinning was a delight to them; they were not humbled on account of it. Our knowledge of sin must be of such a nature that it constrains us to say with the Psalmist: "We have sinned, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly," and to sigh with him: "Remember me, O Lord, with the favor that thou bearest unto thy people; O visit me with thy salvation." Ps. 106. Our knowledge of sin must be such that it renders the heart broken and contrite. As long as a man has not come to this knowledge that he has sinned, and by sin has merited eternal damnation, so long he will always reject the Gospel. Then only when man has come to this knowledge, that he is unworthy of God's favor and worthy only of everlasting shame and contempt, will his heart be a soil in which the Gospel of grace and pardon can take root. If a man thinks that he deserves heaven he can not and will not accept it as an undeserved gift. But when he has come to this knowledge that he has no claim on God whatever, that according to right and justice he must be banished from the presence of God forever, then will he be ready to accept as a gift that which he knows himself unworthy of. There is something similar in worldly matters. We sometimes find poor people who are in need of pecuniary assistance, but who are too proud to acknowledge their poverty and to accept aid. If money is offered them they will say: "I am not so low down that I must beg." We must come to such a knowledge of our unworthiness, we must get *so low down*, that we are ready to accept the salvation of God as a free and unmerited gift.

The centurion at Capernaum possessed this knowledge in a high degree, and he frankly confessed: "*Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof.*" How came he to speak thus? Was he perhaps so poor that he was ashamed to let the Lord see his wretched habitation? or was he so flagrant a sinner that he feared people might regard it an unworthy and offensive thing for the Lord to go to the house of so wicked a man?

Nothing of the kind. This man was neither poor nor despised. He was of high standing, rich and highly honored, even by the Jews; for Luke 7, 4, tells us that the elders of the Jews besought Jesus in behalf of the centurion, saying: "That he was worthy for whom he should do this." In his own estimation he was unworthy, but in the opinion of others he was worthy. He was a pious man "rich in good works." He had forsaken the worship of idols and turned himself to the true God. He loved the Jews and their religion so much that he built a synagogue for them at Capernaum. He did not despise his servant, but did all in his power for him. For his piety and benevolence this man was praised by many, yet he did not come to the Lord arguing, because he had done this and that the Lord should have regard of him and should help his servant. He forgot all his good works and thought only of his great unworthiness.

Would we be partakers of the grace of God in Christ, we must remember our great unworthiness. If we think that we have anything whereof we might boast before God we can not be acceptable in the sight of Him of whom the apostle says: "He resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble." 1 Pet. 5, 5. What are we, and what have we on account of which God would be bound to have regard of us? We were born in sin, we grew up in sin, and we "daily sin much." There is not a day of our past life in which we have not failed manifoldly, and though we strive to live without sin, yet it cleaves unto us continually. We are sinners by nature and, hence, can not be without sin even for a moment. Now if we are continually offending against God, as none of us can deny, of what good are we worthy at His hands? Surely, not one good thing would we have to enjoy, if God would impart to us only that which we are worthy of.

This is the sentiment of all those that are godly: they think themselves unworthy. They are all minded like David who says in the 32d Psalm: "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found." The children of God all pray for the

forgiveness of sin. Search through the Bible and see, if, among the many heroes of faith whose names are recorded therein, you will find one single one who thought himself worthy before God. Every one of them humbled himself and acknowledged his unworthiness. The patriarch Jacob confessed: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant." Gen. 32, 10. Isaiah says: "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." Is. 64, 6. Paul pronounced himself "not meet to be called an apostle" of Christ. All the children of God that ever lived on earth acknowledged their unworthiness before God, and, truly, whosoever thinks himself worthy of God's favor is a proud Pharisee, and not an humble follower of Jesus.

II.

As in his humility, so in his faith the centurion may well be an ensample for us to follow. Garrisoned at Capernaum, where Jesus so often tarried, the centurion must have heard of His preaching and His deeds, and when his servant was taken sick he embraced the first opportunity to appeal to Jesus for help. *"And when Jesus entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented."* These words involve a petition for help, but this the centurion did not express in words, and we will not be wrong in concluding that he thought it sufficient to communicate the fact to the Lord and needless to add anything more. He trusted, if Jesus would hear of his distress He would at once be ready to help. His faith was great, because he had great confidence in the willingness of Jesus to help. Never should we doubt the Lord's willingness to hear, to help and to save. We should rather account it sufficient, if our distress is made known to God, agreeably to the word of the apostle: "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." Phil. 4, 6. Whatever distresses the heart we should make it known unto God and

then, leaving it in His hands, we should be quiet and give thanks unto Him.

The centurion's confidence was not put to shame; for Jesus forthwith answered: "*I will come and heal him.*" This readiness of the Lord served to call forth a clear expression of this man's great faith. Instead of hastening the Lord to come he said: "*Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me; and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.*" This man did not only confess himself unworthy that the Lord should come under his roof, he also declared it unnecessary for the Lord to go to so much trouble; He should speak a word and that would be sufficient; for if he, being a subaltern officer, could accomplish many things by a word, much more must Jesus, being the Almighty God, be able to do with a word whatsoever He pleased. He meant to say to the Lord: Speak the word that my servant shall live, and he must live. The centurion wanted nothing more from the Lord than a word only. He had no scruples: a word from the Lord was all that was needed.

Faith builds on the Word. The Word of the Lord is to be sufficient unto us. Many want something beside the Word on which to rest their faith. The Jews wanted "a sign from heaven," but Jesus answered: "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign." Matt. 12, 39. Because the Jews would not believe His Word, but wanted something more, He pronounced them an "evil and adulterous generation." So it is yet. Many are not willing in all simplicity to believe the Word alone, besides it they want some other sign of God's grace. Some want God to bless them in worldly affairs before believing that He is gracious unto them. Some want a joyous feeling for a sign of their conversion. Some want this, some that. "*Speak the word only,*" says the centurion. To require anything beside the Word is altogether wrong. It is an offense against God. If an honest and trustworthy man promises a thing to you and you say that his word is not enough, he must

give you some other security in addition to it, he will be offended, because you doubt his word. Now if it is an offense to an honest man to ask some other pledge beside his word, how much more is it offensive to God, if we are not willing in all simplicity to accept His Word, but ask some other security beside it? Faith, if it is the right faith, builds on the Word and on the Word alone. The centurion relied on the truth and power of Christ's Word, and he wanted nothing more to rest his faith on, and his faith the Lord praised highly, saying: *"I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness."*

Why are the children of the kingdom, the Jews, cast out and many Gentiles from the east and from the west have obtained the kingdom? The Jews are cast out, because they would not believe the Word of the Gospel, but required a sign, and many that were afar off sit in the kingdom having like faith with the centurion. Those sit down in the kingdom who have one faith with the patriarchs. But of Abraham St. Paul says: "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." Paul does not say: Abraham did great works, or Abraham saw and felt the work of God, he says: Abraham believed God, believed the Word which God had spoken unto him, and this faith was counted unto him for righteousness, through this faith he was justified and saved. If the simple Word of Christ is not sufficient unto us, if we want something above and beside the Word before we will believe, this implies that we do not believe, but doubt His Word; and if we do not believe the Word of Christ we are lost; for He says: "He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." John 3, 36.

Let us see that we build our faith and hope on the right foundation, the unchangeable Word of the unchangeable God. The foundation of the apostles and prophets, the inspired Word alone, is the foundation which can never give way, and which

can not deceive. Our works are as nothing, our feelings and experiences more changeable than the moon, and though with our eyes we would see an hundred signs from heaven and with our ears would hear the voices of the angels, all this could not be so sure and certain unto us as the Word. To this Peter testifies when writing: "We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed." 2 Pet. 1, 18. Here Peter testifies that he and the other apostles did not obtain the Gospel by hearsay, but that they themselves saw and heard the Lord's glory, but that the word of prophecy is more sure than their seeing and hearing. The Word is more sure than the observations of our senses. Our eyes and ears may deceive us that we imagine to see or hear a thing when it is only fancy, but the Word can not deceive, because the "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." This Word is not a human, not an angelic word, it is God's own Word proceeding forth from the Holy Ghost. Now if, as the adage runs, my heart believes what my eyes see, much more shall my soul believe what the Word says.

Surely, those that are not ready in all simplicity to believe the Word, but want other surety beside it, shall not see the kingdom of God; for they "make him a liar." But blessed is he that receives it as God's Word; for truly, God's Word must be a life-giving and saving Word, as the Lord says: "I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting." John 12, 49. He came from the bosom of the Father and spake what the Father had given Him to speak, and "I know," He says, "that His commandment is life everlasting." Every one, therefore, that has and holds the Word of Christ, has life everlasting and shall not come into condemnation.

Do you want to believe the Word, but your faith is weak and you are troubled with doubts, and do you fear you might be cast out? Learn here that a weak faith is nevertheless a true faith. When the Lord says: "*I have not found so great faith,*" His words imply that there are degrees of faith. A weak faith is also a faith and it saves as well as a strong faith. It is the merit of Christ which justifies before God, and that is saving faith which grasps and holds Christ's merits. The treasure remains the same, whether the vessel holding it is strong or weak. Christ remains the same Savior, whether He is held with a strong or a weak hand.

But a weak vessel is more easily broken than the strong. Therefore we should not rest satisfied to remain children in faith, but we should strive for a faith like that of the centurion. And to grow in faith we should diligently occupy ourselves with the Word of God; for "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Rom. 10, 17. And here is a word peculiarly adapted to draw us unto faith. This centurion was a Gentile from a far country, and the Lord says, "*that many shall come from the west, and shall sit down in the kingdom of heaven.*" We too are descendants of a people which went to worship dumb idols, and we dwell in a far western land. But this shall be no hindrance to our entering the kingdom. "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth," says the Lord. Is. 45, 22. From whatsoever place we come, if we do but continue in His Word, the door shall not be shut against us, we shall surely inherit with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Amen.

IV. SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. And behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep. And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him! Matt. 8, 23-27.

In His last discourse with His disciples, in the night in which He was betrayed, the Lord said unto them: "The world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful." The world lives in mirth and gladness, the Christians are sorrowful. The ungodly are prosperous, the Christians are plagued. So it has been ever since the fall of the first man. Cain exulted to shed the blood of his brother: Abel had to yield up his soul under the blows of Cain. Jacob had to depart from home and to flee for his life with nothing but a staff: Esau was prosperous and became a mighty chieftain. Joseph languished in a pit and was sold into slavery: his wicked brothers sat down to eat and to drink. The Egyptians reveled in luxury: the children of Israel had to serve. That rich man clothed himself in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day: Lazarus lay at his door starving and full of sores. Caiaphas and the Pharisees were successful in accomplishing their design: Christ was nailed to the cross. So it is unto this day. The wicked rejoice; they walk in pride, in highmindedness; they gratify their desires; they live in the enjoyment of sin: the pious are plagued every morning, if not outwardly, yet spiritually.

This fact that the wicked are prosperous while the pious are plagued, often becomes a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense both to the world and to the Christians. It is a stone of

stumbling to the world; for seeing the afflictions of the pious, the wicked exult over them and say in their hearts: Behold, they imagined to possess the favor of God, but how are they plagued! If they be the beloved of God, why does not God make them great in the world, prosperous and happy? And the wicked will conclude that the pious are deluded people. When the Christian is afflicted and sees the wicked fare prosperously he too is tempted to say with Asaph in the 73d Psalm: "I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men." When a Christian, being in troubles and afflictions, sees the wicked successful and prosperous, he is tempted to ask whether God be a just God and truly his Father. To natural reason it does frequently appear as though the wicked were the favorites of God, because they are prosperous, and the pious were accursed of God, because they are afflicted. When the high priests and Pharisees succeeded in putting Jesus to death, it certainly did appear, as though they were the sons of God and Christ the rejected.

But we should always remember that, in the very nature of things, it can not be otherwise than the Lord says: "The world shall rejoice, and ye shall be sorrowful." The wicked do not care what is right and what wrong before God, they live after the desires of their own heart; they aim to make as much of life and the world as possible, and when their wishes are realized and their desires gratified, they rejoice; but the Christian sets himself against all that is against God, and because the flesh, the devil and the world are against God, no one can be a Christian without oppositions to meet and self-denials to undergo. In the second place, we should always consider the end. To Asaph the prosperity of the wicked was "painful, until," he says, "I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end." The children of the world travel in a broad way, and the prince of this world provides them pleasures to keep them in that way, but it ends in destruction; the pious travel in a narrow way, but it ends in eternal life. It is as Abraham said to that rich man in hell: "Son, remember that thou in thy life-

time receivest thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." Luke 16, 25. When the wicked enjoy pleasures and heap up treasures the evil one is only securing their souls in his net; but to His Christians the Lord sends afflictions and trials to keep them in the narrow way of faith. It is better to meditate on the usefulness of affliction than to be offended at the prosperity of the wicked. Let me therefore speak of

THE GREAT BENEFITS WHICH AFFLICTION
BRINGS THE CHRISTIAN.

I. Affliction uncovers to the Christian his weaknesses and the dangers besetting him;

II. It draws him closer to the right Helper.

I.

A few verses before this Gospel we read of a scribe who said unto the Lord: "Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest." The words of this man sound well enough, but his heart was not right. When Jesus began to preach and to perform miracles His fame was sounded abroad, and this man thought, if he would associate himself with Christ, he might win honors and great advantages. But the Lord knew that his heart was set on worldly things and He answered accordingly: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." The Lord tells him, in this world he could not expect an easy life, honors and emoluments by following him, he must rather be prepared to endure hardships and privations. On another occasion the Lord expressed the same in clear words saying: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Matt. 16, 24.

Why is it that Christians can not be carried to heaven on beds of ease? Why can we not enter the kingdom except "through much tribulation?" Why does God not turn all affliction, temptation, misfortune and whatever may cause distress, away from His children on earth? Why does God lead His children

so that they must say with Asaph: "All the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning"? I answer: Because we must be saved through faith. Every one that would be saved must be saved through faith in Christ alone. Christ alone is the Savior, and only that man is in Christ who looks to Him alone, who depends on Christ for everything pertaining to his salvation. Hence a false faith, or a trust on anything besides Christ, does not only not save, it tends to destroy the true faith in Christ. Therefore the Lord leads those believing in Him through many tribulations, that they may learn the more to know their weaknesses and to look to nothing else than to Him alone. This is one great benefit of affliction, it manifests to the Christian whether there is any false trust in him, and it teaches him the right trust. This is here exemplified in the disciples.

First we read of them: "*And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him.*" Unlike the scribe spoken of before, the disciples made no mental reservations. They followed the Lord, and that was right. If they had not followed Him, they could not have been His disciples at all. But they did not regard their following the Lord altogether in the right manner. They laid too much store by what they were doing; for later they once said unto the Lord: "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" Matt. 19, 27. The disciples thought they had earned a reward by forsaking all and following Christ. The Lord, loving and kind as He is, on that occasion answered them: "Ye shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel," but that was promising a reward of grace and not a reward of merit; for how should they have earned this high honor in heaven by following Him on earth? And on another occasion He said to them: "When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." Luke 17, 10. Laying too much store by what they were doing in following the Lord, the disciples stepped into that ship; but now this storm arose, and not a common storm, but such a whirlwind against which all their experience in boating could help them nothing.

Despairing of their own skill they appealed to the Lord, and when He had calmed the wind and the waves, it was manifest that they were not doing Him a favor, but He was doing them a favor.

If we have followed the Lord, if we have made sacrifices for Christ and, perhaps for years, have served Him faithfully and zealously, then the thought is apt to arise that we are worthy of and deserve the Lord's blessings, and that we should be spared afflictions. Such ideas are darts which Satan slyly shoots into the mind, and they are dangerous thoughts. So soon as we think that we deserve good at the hands of God, because we have so faithfully served Him, then our trust stands no more on Christ alone, but on our merit and worthiness. The man who thinks himself worthy of God's blessings, because of something which he has done, or is doing, has already fallen from grace; for such an one does no more regard his good works as "filthy rags," he counts them something valuable before God. But this alone is the right and saving faith, that nothing is of value before God save only the blood and death of Jesus Christ. And what shall God do to preserve His children in this humble faith when they are in danger of becoming proud of their many good works? Why God must humble them and show them what they deserve, namely chastisement alone. Yes, the heart is so apt to think, because we serve Him so diligently God ought to crown us with blessings, and great mercy it is, if God teaches us by afflictions that of ourselves we have no worthiness before Him, but must seek our worthiness in Jesus alone.

Another weakness, or fault of the disciples' faith was manifested by their temptation on the sea. On that day the Lord had performed many miracles and if one would have asked the disciples, when in the evening they entered the ship, whether they believed in the Lord, they doubtless would have answered: How could we otherwise than believe after witnessing so many wonderful works this very day. They, doubtless, thought their faith great, their confidence strong, yet when the test came they wavered and were terrified, and the Lord says to them: "*O ye of little faith.*" How shall we account for this? O when they

started from the shore the air was quiet, the water smooth, the ship good. Then it was easy to be confident; for what danger could there be in crossing that little lake? But their confidence stood more in the weather than in the Lord, and when the weather changed their confidence changed; it was gone in a moment. If their confidence had stood so fully, freely, firmly in the Lord as it ought to have, that tempest could not have overthrown it. They would have stood up boldly, thinking: This ship can not sink; let the wind, the waves and all the evil spirits under heaven try their utmost; for in this ship is the Lord, and it must and will float.

When everything goes on smoothly, then it is easy for the Christian to be confident. And yet good days are the most dangerous time for the Christian. When he fares well in worldly things, when Satan is not threatening him with the law and divine justice, when he has peace and is not called on to stand in controversy for the truth, then the heart which is "deceitful above all things" will lead him to think, that all is well with him, that the Lord's favor is resting upon him and he is in no danger. And why does he think so? If not exclusively yet largely because of the peace and welfare which he is enjoying. But that is a false trust; for our trust is not to be in the welfare which we enjoy, but in the living God. So the heart is. When God blesses us the heart is quick to trust in those blessings and to be lifted up because of them. King David experienced this; for in the 30th Psalm he says: "In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved." David's prosperity made him confident, but his trust was not altogether right; it stood too much in his prosperity; therefore the Lord sent him tribulations to teach him this; for in the following verse he adds: "Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled." In good days without affliction we are in strong temptation to think that all is well with us, and that is an evil and a dangerous thought. If the watchman on a ship thinks all is well, there is no danger, he will relax his watchfulness, he will sit down and by and by he will go to sleep, and before he is fully aware of it the ship may be wrecked or taken by pirates. So it was

with the bishop of Laodicea. When he enjoyed peace and quietude he said within himself: "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." Rev. 3, 17. In good days he began to put his trust in himself and thereby he lost the true faith before knowing it; for the Lord counsels him: "Anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see." There is not a more dangerous thought for the Christian than this that all is well with him, and this is one great benefit which affliction brings that it awakens the soul out of this dream of security. When temporal misfortune comes, or that roaring Lion seeks to drag our souls to despair by holding up to us our sins and the curses of the law; when we must go down to our knees seeking light and comfort, yes, that is a remedy for spiritual sleepiness, security and pride. This great benefit of affliction was well known to Paul, and beautifully does he speak of it in 2 Cor. chap. 12.: "Lest I should be exalted above measure there was given to me a thorn in the flesh," and when Paul prayed that this thorn in the flesh be taken from him the Lord answered: "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Affliction teaches us to know how helpless we are. It humbles us and *draws us to look to the Lord for help and strength.*

II.

By uncovering to him his weaknesses, dangers and helplessness affliction draws the Christian to the only one true fountain of help and comfort, the living God. It causes us to say: "Thy face, Lord, will I seek," Ps. 27, 8, and it teaches us to pray "in spirit and in truth." When the waves began to cover the ship the disciples hurried to the Lord "*and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us; we perish.*" At other times the disciples also prayed, but in all the Gospels we do not read that they uttered another prayer like this. The prayer is not long, it is very short; and why? Why, because they were in too much earnest about it to make it long. It was the cry of men in the jaws of death. In this prayer was no hypocrisy, no babbling, no empty repetition of words; it was a wholesouled prayer; their heart

cried unto the Lord as the only One from whom they could yet hope deliverance.

We Christians pray daily, but how are our prayers when there is nothing special oppressing or distressing us? Is it not so, when we see or feel nothing special to pray for, that our prayers are often cold, lukewarm, lifeless, without the right spirit and fervency? But when the cross bears hard on our shoulders then there is life in our praying, then the heart and soul is in it. That storm taught the disciples to pray, and so the prophet Isaiah 26, 16, says in general of affliction: "Lord, in trouble have they visited thee; they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them," and by Hosea the Lord says of Israel: "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offense, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early." Hos. 5, 15.

When the disciples had awakened Jesus He sharply rebuked them for their anxiety saying: "*Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?*" This their littleness of faith the Lord put to shame thoroughly; for "*He arose, and rebuked the wind and the sea; and there was a great calm.*" It does sometimes occur that there is a sudden lull in the storm, but the waves will roll on and subside very gradually. At the command of Jesus both the wind and the sea suddenly became calm as though they had not been disturbed. Such a miracle the disciples had not yet witnessed, and filled with amazement they exclaimed: "*What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him.*" On that ship He stood among the disciples as a man, in the form of a servant, and if the elements obeyed Him then in His state of humiliation, how much rather are all creatures at His command now, since He is exalted to the right hand of the Father and all things are put under His feet? Should we not confide in Him at whose command the winds stop blowing and the waves cease rolling? All creatures obey God, doing that for which He has made them; man only is so perverse that he will neither trust nor obey his Maker. Of this the Lord makes bitter complaint by the prophet Jeremiah saying: "Fear ye not me? will ye not tremble at my

presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it? But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart." Jer. 5, 22. The sands of the seashore and the waves of the ocean obey His decree, but where is the obedience of man? All creatures do that for which God intended them. Us He created that we should honor Him with our heart's trust and confidence, and why do we not confide in Him? Is He not worthy of our confidence? Is He not able to deliver and to save? However weather-beaten and tempest-tossed our bark may be, if the Lord says, it shall float it must float. He is at all times able to make good His word which He spake by the prophet saying: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee." Is. 43, 2. Did He never bring you light and comfort at the time when the waters of affliction came in unto your soul and threatened to overwhelm you? Nestle to His bosom and He will be your helper again.

But bide His time. On the ship He waited until the storm was at its height and hope seemed lost. If He had helped sooner the disciples would not have reaped half the benefit from it. Affliction has its time and the help must come in the nick of time, if it is to be fully appreciated. The Lord knows, how high the storm must rise and how long it must last to purify the atmosphere. To the church at Smyrna the Lord commanded John to write: "I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer. Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life." Rev. 2, 9. God knows your ailing and He also knows how long the distress must last. Let Him number the days, and if they multiply strike up the tune

God liveth still!

Soul, despair not, fear no ill!

Be thy life, until its ending,
Full of thorns, of grief or need,
God, in love the trial sending,
Thus His child would heavenward lead.
For this life's long night of sadness
He will give thee peace and gladness.
Wherefore, then, my soul, despair?
God still lives, who heareth prayer.

This life is indeed like unto a sea over which we are sailing. What therefore should be our first care? Why certainly, that we have the right Man at the helm. What matters it, though we see others sailing along in smooth waters, with towering masts and wide-spread sails, but with the evil one at the helm, steering them to the whirlpool of destruction. What matters it, if our craft be small, rickety, storm-beaten and wave-tossed, if Jesus is at the helm. If He is at the helm no storm will destroy, no rock will wreck our craft; He will steer it safely to the haven of rest. Let us make Him our helmsman, and content our souls with His steering. Amen.

V. SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

TEXT: Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn. Matt. 13, 24-30.

In the third article of the Apostles' Creed we confess: "I believe in a Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints." The church of Jesus Christ upon earth is the communion of saints, the whole number of those who are justified from sin through faith in Jesus Christ, whose transgressions are no more imputed unto them and who, dressed in the robe of Christ, are saints in the sight of God, as though they had never sinned. So Paul describes the church when he writes, Ephes. 5, 25: "Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." The church is the company of those who are born again of water and of the Spirit, and who, cleansed by the blood of Christ, are clean in the sight of God. The church of Jesus Christ therefore is invisible. The grace of God is invisible, faith is invisible, the forgiveness of sin is invisible; invisible is the righteousness of Christ with which the church is adorned.

While the true believers alone are the church in the sight of God, in the sight of men such also are comprised in the community of the church who are not Christians at heart. Hence we are accustomed to distinguish between the visible and the invisible church. To the visible church all those belong who are church members as distinguished from those who make no profession of religion, and who frankly say that they belong to the "big church," that is, to the world. Christ once compared the church with a net, enclosing fishes good and bad. The invisible church comprises only the good fishes to the exclusion of the bad, but the visible church comprises everything that is in the net, good and bad. To the visible church belong also hypocrites and wicked persons, all who have their names on some church roll.

This fact that the net of the church encloses also bad fishes is to many a stumbling block. In all ages the enemies of the Gospel have made it an occasion to decry the church. If a professing Christian becomes guilty of a crime many reporters of newspapers will be sure to make a parade of the fact that he was a church member, and generally this is intended to be a fling at the church, as much as to say that church members are no better than others. The same fact is often used by men of the world to argue, they could not see that it would make much difference, whether a person belonged to the church or not, because there were some good people outside of the church and some bad people inside of it. People who argue in this way do not know or do not consider that the essence of Christianity is not in being good. It is a fundamental tenet of the Christian doctrine that no man can be saved by his own goodness. It is not enough to be a good man or a virtuous woman, but in order to be saved a man must be born again of water and of the Spirit. He must be a Christian confessing Christ before men; for of those who do not confess Him the Lord declares that He will also not confess them. Neither should we overlook the fact that it was not at all the intention of Jesus Christ to establish a church which would comprise no hypocrites in its outward community. Of His own

twelve disciples He said: "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" John 6, 70. And in many parables did He represent His church as a mixed community. One of these is contained in the text read. Let us accordingly consider:

THE PARABLE OF TARES AMONG THE WHEAT, SETTING FORTH

- I. The mixture of wheat and tares;
- II. The treatment to be given the tares;
- III. The separation of wheat and tares.

I.

This highly instructive parable follows immediately after that of the sower who, while sowing his seed, found fourfold soil. In the parable of the sower the seed is the Word of God, and it exhorts unto the right hearing of God's Word, but this parable treats of the nature of Christ's church as it appears visibly on earth. Here therefore the seed does not mean the Word of God, but the good seed are those who are born again of that incorruptible seed, the Word of truth. We read: "*Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.*" Here it might seem to us, that the good seed meant the Word of God, but we must not explain the Scriptures according to our own understanding, or we will often err. We must always bear in mind the principle which the apostle lays down, when he says: "No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation," 2 Pet. 1, 20, and we must always let the Scriptures explain themselves. Now when the multitudes had departed the disciples asked Jesus for an explanation of this parable and He gave it to them saying: "He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil." The good seed in this parable are the true Christians, the tares are the hypocrites and sham Chris-

tians in the church, all who bear the Christian name, but at heart are not believers.

By His Spirit Jesus Christ gathers a church on earth and those whom Christ gathers are all a good seed, Christians indeed. Finding this excellent wheatfield in the midst of his own domains the devil hates the very sight of it and he calculates, if he will let that seed grow unmolested it will not only bring abundant grain, but it will also spread and will encroach mightily on his kingdom. Therefore he tries to prevent the enlarging of that wheatfield by hindering missions and striving to keep people away from the church. But the enemy has a slyer device in aiming to spoil the wheatfield itself, and he goes about it artfully. He is on the sly, watching till the Christians fall to slumbering, then he sows his tares, managing to get such into the community of the church who are his dupes or his willing servants. Christ sows only good seed, but the field becomes mixed when the enemy brings in his tares, and not infrequently he also succeeds in corrupting a good stalk of wheat that it degenerates into a noxious plant. The tares are not of Christ, they are of the devil, neither are they wheat, although they are among the wheat.

Sly as he is the enemy has his good reasons for laboring to get his tares into Christ's field. He knows full well that tares in the woodland or at the roadside will not be half as harmful as in among the wheat. The devil does foster his weeds in the waste places of heathendom and the world, but he is eager to get them into the wheatfield of the church, and how does he exult, if here and there he succeeds in getting so many weeds in that they crowd the wheat, choke much of it and spoil the crop. If a general besieging a city can smuggle some of his men into the citadel, or can corrupt some of the garrison to turn traitors, that brings him greater advantage than planting up batteries. There have been those who claimed that the church must be pure, so that no hypocrites or wicked persons could be found in its community, but such a church is nowhere on earth; for where Christ gathers a church Satan will be sure to scatter tares among the wheat. The visible church always was

a mixed community. In Noah's church was the mocker Ham, in Abraham's church the scoffer Ishmael, in Isaac's church the despiser Esau, in Jacob's church the ten wicked brothers. Under the Old Covenant the people of Israel were the visible church, but often the idolaters and the wicked predominated and the true worshipers were a mere remnant like a lodge in a garden of cucumbers. In the church of the apostles was Simon Magus and many others of whom John complains, writing: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us they would have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." 1 John 2, 19. If in the days of the apostles the church was a mixed body we may not wonder that it is now so full of weeds. And it will always remain a mixed body. The notions of Millenarians that the saints, separated from the wicked, should yet rule on earth for a thousand years, are only dreams; for here the Lord says that both wheat and tares should grow together until the harvest. Surely, no man has reason to be offended, when he sees some tares in the wheatfield of Christ; for Christ Himself said, so it would be.

II.

What is to be done with the tares among the wheat? When the householder had told the servants, whence the tares came, "*the servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest.*" The householder forbade the servants to root up the tares. Should then the tares be allowed to grow unhindered, and should nothing be done to keep them down or to rid the wheatfield of them? These words are sometimes quoted to justify laxity of church practice, but that this is a wrong application of the words is very evident. To Titus Paul wrote: "Rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith," Tit. 1, 13, and concerning the man guilty of incest the same apostle wrote to the Corinthians: "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person." 1 Ep. 5, 13.

The church is commanded to exercise discipline both in doctrine and practice, and this duty of the church is established by this parable. It says: "*While men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat.*" That farmer is not a wise man who will be sleeping while the servants are gathering up the seed wheat. Choosing the seed is a work of such far reaching consequences that a prudent planter will be wide awake and will exercise care that no weeds are mixed with the wheat. The church is not to slumber, it is to watch that the enemy may not be granted an opportunity to sow weeds among the wheat. If the church carelessly receives those into its community who are not Christians and do not actually want to be Christians, it is like a planter who knowingly takes a handful of cheat and throws it into the wheat. The doors of the church are of course to be open to all men. A person's standing or past life is to be no bar to his reception into the church. Christ did not reject, He received, the malefactor on the cross who had been a robber. But the church is to be careful to receive only those who repent of sin and who want to follow Christ. The church heartily desires that all men should repent and should come to the saving knowledge of the truth, but into its own fellowship the church should receive only those of whom it is to be assumed according to charity that they do repent of their sins and truly want to be Christians. The Church is to receive all penitent, but no impenitent sinners.

O that the church of to-day would awaken to realize this duty! The tendency of the age is to laxity. Everywhere those preachers are most in demand who will draw the masses and will increase the membership two or threefold. With many the foremost object is to gain numbers, and whether they are wheat or weeds is with them a secondary consideration. That is a zeal for the church "but not according to knowledge," and it does much harm to the cause of Christ. The more weeds in a wheatfield, the worse for the field. The more hypocrites and non-Christians in a church, the worse for that church. Better a two acre field with few weeds, than a ten acre field with only one fourth wheat, and that crowded by the thorns and pre-

vented from bringing grain in so prolific a measure as it otherwise would.

If the church is to watch that the enemy bring not in his tares, it is also not to be unconcerned about those tares which are found in the wheat. The parable says: "*When the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?*" And again they say: "*Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?*" Seeing the tares in the wheatfield of their master those servants did not pass it by paying no attention to it, neither did they say: It makes no difference, just let it go, and make no disturbance about it; they hated to see those weeds crowding the wheat of their master, and they were so solicitous about it as to come and take counsel with their master, how to remedy this evil. The church, and first of all its ministers and officers, are not to be unconcerned lookers-on, if sins increase and the wicked are multiplied in the church, they are to be solicitous about it and are to take counsel with their Master what to do. And in this case the instructions of the Master are very clear; for thus He says, Matt. 18: "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." The church is to rebuke sin and manifest sinners who will not repent are to be cut off from its fellowship. There are those who regard church discipline harmful, because it would diminish the membership, and they consider not that cutting out weeds is not diminishing the wheat. A prudent farmer will tell his servants: We must by all means save every stalk of wheat, for it will make noble grain, but what we *can* do to get out those thorns and thistles without damaging the wheat we must do, because they are doing harm there. Weeds there

will always be while the world stands, but better they are at the roadside than among the wheat.

What then does it mean that the Lord here forebade the servants to root up the tares? On this the Lord has not left us in the dark. In His explanation of the parable He says: "The field is the world." If the Lord had said: The field is the church, then it would mean that the tares should be allowed to thrive inside the community of the church, but the master prohibits the servants only from rooting the tares out of the field of the world. The Christian church has the authority to exclude manifest and impenitent sinners from its communion, but it has no authority to put them to death. The church has the power of the Word, but not the power of the sword. The church can refuse fellowship to impenitent sinners; it can tell them that they are under the wrath of God and forever lost unless they repent, and to do this is the sacred duty of the church; but the church has no authority and no right to impose any kind of worldly punishment on impenitent sinners. Mohammed commanded that his religion should be spread by the power of the sword, but Jesus Christ forbade His church the use of the sword.

His reason for forbidding the rooting up of the tares the householder assigns in these words: "*Lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.*" Whenever and wherever the church resorted to force to promote its object it did only harm to the wheat. The Montanists of ancient times and the Anabaptists of Reformation times undertook to exterminate the wicked with the sword, and their undertaking ended in blood. Rome instituted the Inquisition to convert heretics and to preserve unity of the faith, but the Inquisition soon went to rooting up the wheat, and by it many thousand true Christians were burned at the stake or otherwise put to death. So history abundantly shows that it was by no means a needless thing for the Lord to forbid His church attempting to root up the wicked from the acre of the world. All the church can do is to remove briers from her own field, and to set them by the wayside.

III.

But there is a time when a complete separation of wheat and tares will take place. Of that time the text says: "*Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.*" Of this part of the parable the Lord says in His explanation: "The harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of the world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear." Hear it, ye wild woodland briers, and ye tares in the field! Ye shall be gathered in bundles and cast into everlasting fire, while the wheat is garnered in the granaries of God. O what a separation that will be! When the Lord will begin to stir the mixed heap with the shovel of His righteous judgment, how many a shovelful will show a quantity of tares and a paltry handful of wheat! If we consider the worldliness which is flooding the church and imagine the Lord suddenly coming to separate wheat and chaff, what a pile of chaff there would be.

Let us take warning from this text, and let us not flatter ourselves that the world is condemned, but we are church members and all right. The world is indeed condemned; for Christ will not confess those in the judgment who do not confess Him on earth, but the tares among the wheat are of the same spirit with the world and they will share its condemnation. It is not enough to belong to the outward community of the visible church; we must be wheat. The chaff and the tares are not gathered into the everlasting barns.

O a glorious day, that great day of the harvest! Here in this world the wheat must content itself to be mixed with the weeds. Here in this life the Christian must dwell together

with the children of Belial, yea, must perhaps call them father, mother, sister, brother. Here in this world the Christian, while wearily wending his way to heaven, must often see his own bodily offspring walk in the way of destruction. In this life the true believer must frequently approach the Lord's table with those of whom he is convinced that they are not Christians, or must kneel with those of whom he knows that their prayers are abomination to the Lord. But the day is coming when the weeds will be separated and the pure wheat will be stored in the house with many mansions. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

O happy day, and yet far happier hour,
When wilt thou come at last?
When fearless to my Father's love and power,
Whose promise standeth fast,
My soul I gladly render,
For surely will His hand
Lead her, with guidance tender,
To heaven, her fatherland. Amen.

VI. SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

TEXT: And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only. And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead. Matt. 17, 1-9.

The object for which the Son of God was made flesh and dwelt on this earth in the form of a servant, patiently enduring mockeries, bonds, stripes, wounds and death, the object of all this was, to restore again to us what we had lost by the envy of Satan and by the sin of our first parents. "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." 1 John 3, 8. He came to take away sin and to destroy all the evil which the devil has brought into the world. Therefore He before said by the prophet: "I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds." Jer. 30, 17. The wounds which Satan inflicted on us, the running sores of sin which bring death to soul and body, all these the Son of God came to heal. He came to take away the evils which beset and oppress us, and to restore unto us in body and soul that pristine health which man had when he was formed by the hand of his Maker. This healing the Lord begins in us in this life by forgiving us our sins, by burdening us with the cross that the

old Adam may be mortified in us together with all evil lusts, and by prompting us through His Word and Spirit unto a holy life, and He will finish our healing on the day of our resurrection, when He will call our bodies from the dust of the earth purified from sin, that we, healed in soul and body, may "live under Him in His kingdom, in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness."

This healing which costs us nothing cost the Son of God dearly. He had to purchase it for us in a hard servitude, by lowliness, meekness, suffering, bleeding and dying. He verily had to become what the prophet had foretold, "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." Is. 53, 3. Yet even in the days of His flesh it was already manifested in many ways, that His servitude could not be in vain, but would bring forth for man the fruit of everlasting salvation and blessedness. When He cast out devils He betokened that He was come to break the fetters with which Satan had bound us. When He healed the sick He gave evidence that He is come to heal our sicknesses. When He quieted the raging winds and calmed the surging waves He indicated, that He quiets the billows of an uneasy conscience and gives peace to the heart. When He raised up dead He exemplified that He was come to abolish death and to bring life and immortality to light. But it was on the Mount of His transfiguration where the Lord gave to three of His disciples the highest and brightest sample or figure of the salvation and glory which we obtain by His servitude. As He was transfigured so that no more the form of a servant, but only the glory of divine majesty was seen in Him, so shall we be transformed that no more wounds and bruises, weaknesses and death will be found in us, but all will be health, strength and beauty; for He "shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body." Phil. 3, 21. "We shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." 1 John 3, 2.

Therefore in our labors, trials, struggles and weaknesses, in the death of this present life, the Lord's transfiguration should be to us a shining star of hope. To awaken and refresh our hope let us to-day in the spirit of our mind joyfully witness:

THE LORD'S TRANSFIGURATION ON THE MOUNT.

- I. How it transpired;
- II. What effect it had on the disciples; and
- III. How we are made partakers of His glory.

I.

The transfiguration of Christ took place a week after He first told His disciples that He must suffer and die at Jerusalem. This prediction of His suffering and death was very offensive to them, so much so that Peter took Him aside and said unto Him: "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee." Peter, not yet rightly understanding the Lord's mission, thought He should be spared such shame and suffering, but Jesus replied: "Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offense unto me; for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." His transfiguration so soon after this occurrence was to show the disciples that His suffering and death were not against His glory, but rather through dishonor He would obtain the highest honor; for from that same body, which was to be spitted on, stripped and nailed to the cross, divine glory shone forth.

"And after six days, Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart." Matthew says "after six days," Luke says: "And it came to pass, about an eight days after these sayings." There are different ways of computing time. From Sunday to Sunday, the Sundays excluded, is six days; from Sunday to Sunday, the Sundays included, is eight days. To say "after six days," and again "about an eight days after" is not a contradiction.

For witnesses of His transfiguration Jesus chose the three most prominent of His disciples, Peter, James and John. Peter had taken special exception to the Lord's saying that He must die at Jerusalem, James was to become the first martyr among the apostles being put to death by Herod at Jerusalem, and John was to become the principal defender of Christ's divinity. With these three the Lord went up into a high mountain. This mountain is not named by the Evangelists, but the earliest

church fathers agree in saying, and it is generally accepted, that it was mount Tabor, the highest mountain in Galilee and a secluded place. When they had arrived on the mountain Jesus betook Himself to prayer and while He prayed He *“was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.”*

The apostles compare the glory shining forth from the Lord with the brightest visible creatures. We mortals know of nothing and can imagine nothing brighter than the sun or more shining than the light. Human language lacks the words fully to express the glory of the invisible God, and the Scriptures speak to us by way of comparison to convey to our minds some idea of what it is. Yet we must not think that the Lord's countenance shone with a glaring light which would have blinded the eyes like the noonday light of the sun. It was a lovely, beatifying light; for ravished with delight did the disciples look upon the Lord. But you will not expect me to describe to you the glory of Christ transfigured. To such a request I could only reply: Let us see that we die in the Lord; then we will know His glory, when we shall see Him face to face. Coming down the mountain the Lord charged the disciples, saying: *“Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.”* His transfiguration was not yet to be made public, because it was something which belonged to His state of exaltation. Hence we should content ourselves to walk by faith until the day of our exaltation, when we shall “meet the Lord in the air.”

But this we may ask: Whence came the glory visible in Him? It came not from without, but from within. In the Old Testament there was one man of whom, in a certain sense, we may say that he was transfigured. It was Moses. When he came down from the mount, where he had conversed with God, his face shone that the children of Israel could not bear to look on him. That light shining in the countenance of Moses was impressed on him by his intercourse with God. It was from without and not from within. But it was not so with Jesus Christ. He was God. In Him dwelt all the fulness of the

Godhead bodily. In His state of humiliation He ordinarily kept His divine majesty hid that the eye of man could not discern it, but there on the mount it shone forth in Him. Therefore His very garments were made white as the light. The light in Moses' countenance, being only communicated from without, was hid when he covered his face with a veil, but the garments of Jesus were no obstruction to the brightness streaming from His body. It was the brightness of His Divinity made visible to the bodily eye of the disciples, and to that brightness His vesture could be no obstruction. For this we have the testimony of both Peter and John. Peter writes: "We were eye-witnesses of his majesty, when we were with him in the holy mount," 2 Pet. 1, 16, and John says: "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father." John 1, 14.

Mark well this wonderful occurrence on mount Tabor, and learn from it that divine glory is in very deed communicated to the humanity. It was the same body which shone in divine glory and which was raised on the cross covered with shame, even as Peter accused the Jews that they "crucified the Lord of glory." When the body of Jesus Christ was raised on the cross the Lord of glory was being crucified, and because a body possessing divine glory was made the ransom for us we may not doubt that our sins are atoned for and we shall surely come to dwell in that city which John saw and of which he says: "The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." Rev. 21, 23.

From that city two men appeared on the mount of transfiguration: "*And behold there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.*" Elias had not died, he was taken to heaven in a fiery chariot. Moses died on mount Nebo and was buried by God Himself. Here Moses appeared together with Elijah; so his body had been raised again from the grave. There is another life after this present life. Moses and Elias were not dead, they lived and were in communion with God, otherwise they could not have conversed with the Lord. When

man departs this life he enters on another and an altogether different life; for this present is a bodily and that other a spiritual life. This is here exemplified; for those two men had long since departed out of this life, yet they lived and their bodies were now in such a condition that they could appear and disappear. Of that spiritual, heavenly life we know nothing certain save only what the Scriptures tell us. That we ourselves may enter that life and learn all about it, we must give heed to the subject on which those two men conversed with Jesus.

On what did they speak? Did they talk on monkery, or fasting, or church ceremonies, or the mourners bench, or holiness meetings, or doing right? Here were two men from the celestial city speaking with the Son of God. Certainly they did not engage in flimsy talk, but chose a subject of vast and vital importance, and the conversation taking place on earth we may surmise that it concerned the weal and woe of us earth-born mortals, and so it did. Matthew does not name the subject, but Luke 9, 31, does. He says: "They spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem." This was the great subject, this the burden of their conversation, the Lord's capture, trial, death, burial and resurrection. Do you think: O is that the outcome? That tedious old story, heard a hundred times! Had they not something more interesting, the glories of heaven or the mysteries of the spirit world, to talk about? Friend, if you find the history of Christ's death a tedious old story, you are certainly of a different mind than Moses and Elias. To them the death of Christ at Jerusalem was the great, the all-absorbing subject, and the same is the case with all the saints standing before the throne of God; for their song to the Lamb runs thus: "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests." Rev. 5, 9. The Lamb's blood and death is the admiration of the saints in heaven, their song and their happiness. If to you all this is a tedious old story you are not fitted for the company of the saints; neither will you be found there, unless you put away your carnal mind and crawl to the cross. The cross of

Christ is your salvation. O make it the talk of your soul; commune on it in your heart.

II.

From that heavenly conversation the disciples might or ought to have learned the true meaning of Christ's suffering and death, but they were so filled with amazement that they could scarcely realize what they were thinking or doing. This is evident from the words of Peter; for he said: "*Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.*" Peter was so enthused that he forgot everything. His wife, his friends, his property were all forgotten. He wanted to stay on that mountain and never to come down again. Peter forgot even himself; for he spake only of three tabernacles, one for Jesus, one for Moses, one for Elias, but none for himself. His soul was so ravished with joy that all his desire was so to behold the Lord always. Peter was indeed talking foolishly when he spake of building huts there. Just from the Lord's conversation with Moses and Elias he ought to have understood that Jesus must come down from that mountain to die a shameful death at Jerusalem, but "he wist not what to say." Mark 9, 6.

From the effect of the Lord's transfiguration on the disciples we may learn a few things concerning the life in the new heaven and the new earth. The disciples at once knew Moses and Elias, not by pictures which they had seen,—there were no photographs of those men—, they knew them by intuition. The saints in heaven will recognize one another, and what joy it will be to meet the martyrs and all those who loved and confessed Christ on the earth! It is joy to meet with those whom we dearly love. But this earthly joy is a mere shadow of what will be in those realms where love is perfect.—Fascinated by the sight of the Lord's glory Peter forgot everything else. When we shall see the Lord face to face all will be forgotten which could disturb our happiness. The former things will then have passed away. Earthly loves, earthly affections and aspirations, earthly cares and afflictions will be past and will

trouble the heart no more. The seeing of the Lord's glory will afford full satisfaction.—Heaven is the place where tabernacles are built and not taken down; tabernacles which will remain, when the mountain on which Peter proposed to build will be no more. “We know,” says St. Paul, “if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” 2 Cor. 5, 1. From those tabernacles none will wish to remove; they will all say: “*It is good for us to be here.*”

Is it your desire to be there? Does your heart consent to Paul, when he says: “In this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven?” Does your soul agree with David, when he says: “My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord?” Do you with fulness of heart join in the song:

Jerusalem, my happy home,
 Name ever dear to me.
 When shall my labors have an end
 In joy, and peace, and Thee?
 When shall these eyes Thy heaven-built walls
 And pearly gates behold?
 Thy bulwarks with salvation strong,
 And streets of shining gold?

The lover of Jesus is resigned to the Lord's will, whether to live or die, but his longing is to depart and to be with Jesus, and his soul says: The sooner the better.

III.

Does your heart tremblingly say: Ah indeed! Who would not desire to see the glories of heaven? But how shall I be found worthy to enter there? I have sinned and my garments are spotted. Let me direct you to a circumstance in this text which will teach you where to seek your worthiness.

The garments of Jesus were of earthly fabric and though He wore good garments so that the soldiers crucifying Him thought it worth while to cast lots for His coat, yet Jesus did not possess many changes of raiment, and it is safe to conclude that by much travel His garments were more or less soiled and dusty.

Yet by the glory flowing from His body "his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them." If we are to be found "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light," our souls must be dressed in white. But to make the soul pure and white earthly powers and human skill are all in vain. Unto Judah the prophet said: "Though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord." Jer. 2, 22. There is only One who can make the soul white. It is He of whom the prophet Malachi said: "He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi; and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness." This refiner and purifier is Jesus, who made His own earthly garments white as the light, and shining as His raiment was, it is but an emblem of the "garments of salvation" which He has earned for us. Dressed in His righteousness, the robe of His merits, our souls are gloriously arrayed in the sight of His Father; for of Him the Father bears this testimony: "*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*" Well pleased with His Son the Father must be well pleased with those that are in Christ.

O you who have walked in sin, you who have soiled your soul and loaded your conscience, you who have made your members weapons of unrighteousness, turn to Jesus Christ. He can make white and pure. Be the spots in your soul never so dark, your deeds never so black, Christ's glory will ever overcome them. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Is. 1, 18. Turn to Jesus, beseeching Him to make white your garments, and doubt not that His blood cleanses you from all sin.

The publican and dying thief
Applied to Christ and found relief;
Nor need you entertain a doubt:
He will in no wise cast you out.

This is the Father's command that you come to Jesus; for He says: "*Hear ye him.*" Hear Jesus Christ. What has He

to say? He says: "I am the Lord that healeth thee." Acknowledge that you are sick, sick unto death and hear Him saying: "The son of man is come to save that which was lost." "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee." "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Turn to Jesus Christ; incline unto Him the ears of your heart and hear Him speaking to you in many words of great promise, and you will soon learn to say:

I heard the voice of Jesus say:
 "I am this dark world's light;
Look unto me, thy morn shall rise,
 And all thy day be bright!"
I looked to Jesus, and I found
 In Him my Star, my Sun;
And in that Light of life I'll walk
 Till traveling days are done. Amen.

SEPTUAGESIMA.

TEXT: The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a house-holder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market-place, and said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right, I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the good man of the house, saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen. Matt. 20, 1-16.

The kingdom of heaven, the visible church of Christ on earth, is like unto a field in which wheat and tares are mixed together. The wheat are the true Christians, the tares are those who are in the outward community of the church, but are not Christians at heart. To these tares belong the drones and idlers, who are in the church of Christ, but do nothing for it. In the parable before us, the kingdom of Christ is compared with a vineyard, and those called to it with laborers in the vineyard. Now a vineyard is a place where there is much and some hard work to do. Herein is a similarity between the kingdom of

Christ and the kingdom of the world. Man is not placed on this earth to idle away his lifetime, but to labor in some useful employment. Many count laboring a disgrace, and there are not a few who will rather beg than dig, rather steal than work; but in fact it is idleness and not work which is a disgrace to man; for 2 Thes. 3, 11, St. Paul writes: "We hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busy-bodies." To idle away the days and not to work, that is a disgrace to an able bodied man, and it is walking disorderly for God's order is that every man should be occupied in some useful employment. God has not only commanded this, to industrious labor He has also given great promises. Thus the 128 Psalm says: "Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labor of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee." The man who labors industriously in the fear of God has the promise that God will supply him what he needs for himself and family; but the idler has no promise, save that poverty shall overtake him as an armed man. Let the drone be rich or poor, he is a nuisance in the community; an evil example, harmful and of no good.

Similar in the church. If a church has five hundred members, but drones, do-nothings, how shall that church thrive? Certainly, if three earnest workers join together they will accomplish more than a hundred drones. This householder goes out to hire laborers into his vineyard. Those called to the kingdom of Christ are also called to labor in it. Here the word is: All hands to work; drones are not wanted; they are only a hindrance and a drawback. Of that unfruitful tree in His vineyard the Lord said: "Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" Luke 13, 7. The drone in the church is nothing but an encumbrance. He himself will do nothing, and he is a hindrance to those who want to work and who do work. Drones are tares, an encumbrance to the wheat. Be not an idler in the vineyard, but lend your hand that the kingdom may thrive and grow and be spread abroad.

Yet from this fact that drones are only an encumbrance, it does not follow that those who do work are all pleasing to the housefather. If a laborer works hard and does it all wrong, his industry will occasion so much more harm to his employer. It must be the right kind of work performed in the right spirit. Hence selecting only the main thought in this text let me set forth:

THE PARABLE OF THE LABORERS IN THE VINEYARD A PROOF
THAT WE ARE SAVED ALONE BY GRACE; showing

- I. How the parable proves this; and
- II. What warning and comfort is contained in it.

I.

From this parable, which is so exceedingly rich in contents, I desire to-day, in the most simple manner possible, to exhibit only the chief and main point of doctrine which the Lord here intended to inculcate. Given in a few words it is this: In the kingdom of Christ an altogether different rule obtains than in worldly transactions. In this world the rule is: As the labor, so the wages. That is equity and justice. But in the kingdom of Christ there is neither earning nor paying of wages. Whatever a man receives of spiritual gifts, is all alone by the grace of God, and never because that man earned it or in any way deserved it. In Christ's kingdom all is grace, and nothing but grace.

How does the parable prove this?

The connection is this: Peter, speaking for all the apostles, asked the Lord: "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" Peter did indeed not follow Jesus for the sake of reward, he walked with Jesus because he believed Him the promised Savior. But aside from this faith Peter had the idea, because they had forsaken all and followed the Lord, they deserved and ought to have some reward. When Peter appealed to their forsaking all and inquired about the reward, this was as much as saying: Lord, we have done this much for Thee, now what wilt Thou do for us? Peter

argued from the rule which obtains here on earth among men. It is this: One favor is deserving of another; honest work, honest pay; I do you a good turn, so in equity you ought to regard yourself under obligation to do me a good turn; I work for you, so you owe me wages. That is the principle underlying Peter's question. It is the principle on which dealings among men are, or, at least, ought to be, invariably carried on. The workman ought to do an honest day's work, and the employer ought to pay him an honest day's wages. That is right and equitable here on earth among men.

According to this rule of mutual right and equity among men Peter wanted to learn of the Lord, what He would give them for what they had done for Him. The Lord answered Peter, they would verily not remain unrewarded, they would be rewarded a hundred fold, and they would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel, but He added: "Many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first." This was a word of warning to Peter, and it implied: By looking and asking for reward he was stepping on dangerous ground, and he must quit doing so, or out of a first one he would become a last one and would lose both inheritance and reward. To this warning the Lord annexed this parable, and hence it is very evidently the Lord's direct and chief object to teach that in His kingdom an entirely different rule obtains than in dealings among men. What is that rule?

The parable runs thus: In the morning the householder hires laborers for his vineyard and contracts with them for a penny a day, the penny standing for the common day's wages. During the day, and even towards night, he engages other laborers and contracts with them on the same principle; for he says: "*Whatsoever is right, I will give you.*" So all these laborers go to the vineyard to work in it, and at sunset they come for their wages. All this is very simple, according to right and contract.

But now comes the remarkable part of the parable. "*So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the laborers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were*

hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny." Some had labored twelve hours, some six, some only one hour; yet the householder pays those who had worked only one hour the same amount as the first with whom he had contracted in the morning. Now those hired first thought this wrong, and they spoke up against the householder saying: "*These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.*" Were they not justified in murmuring? Was it right and according to equity what this householder did? Those dissatisfied ones calculated in this way: We get a day's wages for twelve hours work, so those who labored only one hour ought to get one-twelfth of a day's wages; or if those hired last are paid more, we too ought to get proportionately more. Those hired first are indeed not cheated, they get what they contracted for, but what they object to is that the last are paid the same amount.

Well, could not the householder make a present to those hired last? So he could, and if he had given it *as a present* then none of the others would have had any show of right to say a word against it; for when it comes to making presents then I have the choice, to whom I want to present a gift and what I will give him. But here there was nothing said of making presents, neither was the penny given as a present; for the householder commanded his steward: "*Call the laborers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.*" To all the penny was given as wages. Hence there can be no question about it, this householder does not act according to the rule of equity among men. You hire six men: three labor a day, three half a day, and at night you pay them each seventy-five cents. Against this the three first would have reason to grumble and all the neighboring farmers would say: That will never do, because it tends to raise the wages.

That this householder acted according to a different rule than that of merit and reward, labor and pay, is evident, for to one of those grumblers he said: "*Friend, I do thee no wrong:*

didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? is thine eye evil, because I am good?" He says: The pittance for which thou didst contract with me, thou hast received, and now go. But as to my goods, they are mine own; I owe them to no man and I will divide them as I see proper, according to mine own goodness and benevolence. So those grumblers, who thought they ought to get more, were sent away in displeasure, whereas those who received the penny as not earned and not deserved, as coming from the goodness of the householder, retained his good pleasure.

Christ does not deal with those called into His kingdom according to the rule of what is right and fair. If He did, His kingdom would cease to be a kingdom of salvation for sinners, and we would all be lost; for all have sinned, and if He would deal with us according to right, the sentence could be none other than this: "The wages of sin is death." Christ observes a rule which is the very opposite of justice. Jesus Christ is not come to condemn the world, but to save the world; not to punish sin, but to forgive sin; not to consign the sinner to eternal death, but to bring him eternal life. Jesus Christ is not come to pay us according to our work, but freely to bestow on us the gifts of His grace and mercy. He deals with us according to His goodness, and not according to what we have earned and deserve. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." Tit. 3, 5. In Christ's kingdom all is grace, nothing pay, nothing wages. He did promise a reward even for giving a cup of cold water, but what reward? A hundred fold reward. That is not according to what is deserved, it is the abounding of His mercy and loving kindness.

II.

There are also other doctrines which may be set forth from this parable, but this is clearly *the point* which the Lord aimed

to impress on the minds of His disciples. In the kingdom of this world and in the kingdom of Christ two entirely different rules obtain. As the labor, so the pay—that is right among men; but in the kingdom of Christ all is grace, and though a Christian has labored ever so long and ever so industriously, all that he receives is purely by the goodness of the householder, and not because he has earned and deserved it. Paul labored more than any of the other apostles, yet the Lord said unto him: “My grace is sufficient for thee.” Therefore mark these two rules well and do not exchange or mix them together; for neither of them will apply in the other kingdom. The rule of Christ’s kingdom will not apply in earthly affairs. Suppose you would offer me my year’s salary with the remark that it is a gift and present, I would answer: Friends, in that way I shall not take it; for I have spent my time and labor in your service and it is my wages and not a present. But on the other hand, if I have labored in the service of Christ for a year, can I then come before Him and say: Lord, I have labored a twelve-month for Thee, where are my wages? Would He not answer: Thou ungrateful servant. Have not I shown good unto thee from the days of thy childhood, when thou deservedst it not? “*Take that thine is, and go thy way.*” Therefore I repeat, mark these two rules well and apply each in its proper place, and do this not only in theory, but practically in your own heart and mind, and it will spare you much trouble and anguish of heart.

Remember, there are in the visible Church two kinds of workers. Some work with an eye to the reward, some from gratitude towards God and from the love of that which is good. Those who labor with an eye to the reward do, as a rule, labor hard, but they are always ready to complain that God does not bless and prosper them as He ought, and they are envious of those who have not labored as long and as much as they, and yet are made equal with them. What do such wage-workers get? They generally do get the pittance of advantages which an outwardly pious and moral life brings in this world, as the Lord says of the Pharisees with respect to their praying at street

corners and their giving alms in the market places: "They have their reward." Their reward was honor before men, that was their penny, and it was all they got. Be warned therefore, and be not a wage-worker in the Lord's vineyard, or you are found a servant and not a son, and the servant remains not in the house. And even the most advanced Christian should never regard this warning needless for him. The old Adam is so easily tickled with the idea of being deserving, and the devil is sly enough to tempt unto trust in works under the very name of grace. He can argue: Oh! it is all grace; but see, you do what so many will not do, you go to church, you read, you do good, therefore you have obtained and possess grace. That is making the very gift of grace a kind of reward obtained by man's work. We must never lose sight of this fact: every man that is saved, is saved in no other way than the malefactor on the cross, simply by the mercy of God.

Before Him none can boasting stand,
But all must fear his strict demand,
And live alone by mercy.

But this parable has also comfort for down-cast hearts, such as say: "I long to work in the Lord's vineyard, but I am not so situated as to do much in any way, and when I try to do some good, something is sure to come up and to spoil it. Shall I then be excluded as an unprofitable servant and of no benefit to the vineyard?" Indeed, we do little, and what we do is all nothing but patchwork. There is not one in this house who can show up one hour of thoroughly good and faultless labor in the Lord's vineyard. The Christian does good, but as long as he is not rid of the flesh, he cannot do one work which is not tainted and imperfect in some way. Instead of taking pride and putting trust in our good works, we have rather reason to be ashamed of them before God, because, measured by the standard of holiness, not one of them could pass muster.

O what a precious thing that the householder deals with us according to His own mercy. "*I will give unto this last even as unto thee.*" The gifts of grace were set before those grum-

blers, but they did not want gifts, they wanted wages, whereas those who knew that they had earned nothing, were glad to receive the gift. If you feel your unworthiness, despair not. It is not a gift of reward which is for the worthy, it is grace, and because it is grace, therefore it is for those who have not earned it and are not worthy of it. Are you unworthy? God is gracious.

By grace! Our works are all rejected,
All claims of merit pass for naught;
The mighty Savior, long expected,
To us this blissful truth has brought,
That He by death redeems our race,
And we are saved alone by grace. Amen.

SEXAGESIMA.

TEXT: And when much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a parable: A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way-side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit a hundred-fold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be? And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand. Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way-side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience. Luke 8, 4-15.

Great are the exertions which are now made to refine and ennoble the human race. Progress is the watchword of the age, not only in material improvements, but also in the culture of the mind; and it is certainly true, education was never so widespread, never so general as it is now. By education, men say, the human race is becoming nobler, better; its moral standard more elevated. And the theory is advanced, the more widespread and thorough education would become, the more would vice be subdued, the more would the nobler qualities of our race be developed.

Now the Christian church has never been an opponent of education and learning; in all ages the church has proved herself the foster-mother of learning, science and the fine arts.

Where the Bible is introduced barbarism must vanish, civilization follows in its wake. The Christian nations are the civilized, the educated, the enlightened ones. But in our times education is so greatly overestimated that many count it the salvation of the world. If we ask, what is the need of the world? men will answer: Education. We Christians know that education is not the true help of the world. Education is good, it is praiseworthy, but when men think education *the one thing needful*, when they say that education would redeem the human race from the pool of depravity into which it has fallen, that is a fatal error. When education is made to supplant the Gospel of Jesus Christ it is put to an evil and harmful use. The heart of man is evil and remains evil, though you educate him a thousand years in all the sciences of this world. Does not history tell us, and does not our own observation prove to us that frequently the most educated are the most vicious of men? I am of course not speaking against education. From a worldly point of view the best fortune which parents can provide for their children is to give them a good education. That is better than to leave them a pile of money. I am speaking against education being made the savior of mankind, and I say: Education can make a man a gentleman, but it cannot make him a Christian.

There is but one thing in the world which can, in the true and full meaning of the word, **HELP** man, and that is the Word of the cross. It alone is the incorruptible seed by which men are born again to become new creatures. Education gives to man outward polish, but the Word of the cross makes him a new creature from heart and soul. The true help of man is to hear the Word of God, and that is his only help. All those who would become new creatures, who would be born again to an imperishable hope, must hear the Word of God. Human wisdom and human contrivances may change and polish the manners, but the heart they can not change; this only that Word can do which is "the power of God."

The Gospel of Christ is now scattered broadcast throughout the world, and it is a good and powerful seed which brings

fruit wherever it is sown. It blesses a heart here and saves a soul there. "It is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Rom. 1, 16. Yet not in all does the seed bring fruit to perfection. The Lord distinguishes four kinds of hearers. Hence let me speak on

THE FOURFOLD HEARING OF GOD'S WORD.

I.

Of the first class of hearers the Lord says: "*A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.*" This He explains thus: "*Those by the wayside are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.*" This class are persons who do hear the Word, but they are not renewed, not converted, not saved by it. Their hearts are like unto a hard-trodden pathway. The seed falls on the surface and it remains on the surface, and in a very short time it has disappeared again. They do not take the Word to heart, they do not understand it and soon they have forgotten it. To preach the Gospel to this class of hearers is like beating the air. You may beat the air an hundred strokes with a switch, you will hear a whistling sound and you will gradually feel your arm tiring, but that is all; not a vestige of the strokes will remain in the air. This class of hearers may hear the Gospel for years, yet they understand and know nothing or very little about it. If you will look around among your acquaintances you will, no doubt, find such who go to preaching, and as for the law they know well enough what is right and wrong among men, but when it comes to the Gospel they do not understand the first principles of it, although they have heard it perhaps an hundred times.

Where is the fault? Is it in the seed? O no! it is not the fault of the seed; the seed is good. It is the same seed whether it falls "*by the wayside*" or "*on good ground.*" One and the

same Gospel is preached to all, and of it Christ says: "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." John 6, 63. Where is the fault? Is it in the quality of the soil, because it is hard? This the text does also not say; it only says: "*Some fell by the wayside,*" but it does not say that this was the reason why it could not grow. Originally the hearts of all are like the wayside soil. By nature all have a stony heart, and this is a divine seed with divine power to make the hardest soil soft and fertile. "Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" Jer. 23, 29. That which can break rocks can also break wayside soil.

The text says of the seed: "*It was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.*" That is the reason. The seed is trodden down. Those by the wayside themselves tread down the seed. When they hear the Word they put it from them, as Paul said to the Jews of Antioch: "It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles." Acts 13, 46. The wayside hearers put the Word from them, saying within themselves that they do not want it.

Others, when they hear the Word, are touched by it, but they argue: If I would let this seed grow in my heart, what would my acquaintances say? how would my companions regard me? would they not call me a fool, and would I not lose their friendship? They think they could not afford to risk losing the friendship of men and they put down the Word.

The seed by the wayside is not only trodden down, it is also devoured by the fowls of the air: "*Then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts.*" The devil knows that it is the Word which does the harm to his kingdom and therefore, if he can not keep people from going to hear, he will be busy to take the Word from their hearts even while the pastor is preaching. If he can make the mind drowsy, or fill it with thoughts of pleasure or business or sinful and filthy imaginings the Word can not enter the heart. And with many

who did give attendance to the Word the enemy succeeds in taking it from them by a chat at the church door, or a diversion in the evening. If you go to church every Sunday, but each time allow the enemy to take the Word from you it is labor lost, and your last estate will be worse than the first.

Does not the text exculpate those by the wayside? Does not the Lord plainly say to the disciples: "*Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.*" Must we not conclude from these words that it was not the will of the Lord that those people should understand His doctrine, believe and be saved? And if it was not His intention that they should understand, how could any guilt fall on them? These conclusions appear very reasonable, but they are not founded in the text and do not follow from it. If the Lord had said, He spoke to the people in parables for *this* reason, because He did not *want* them to understand and be saved, then He would have contradicted many passages of the Scripture which so distinctly declare, that He will have all men to come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved. The text is clear in itself if we only examine it right. The reason why the seed by the wayside does not grow and bring fruit is, because it is trodden down and devoured. The Sower sows the seed with the intent that it should grow, He sows good seed, and it would grow and bring fruit if it were not trodden down and devoured. To this the devil himself gives testimony; for he "*cometh and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.*" The devil knows for what purpose the seed is sown; he knows that it is good seed and if left there will bring forth faith and salvation; therefore he says: I must be at hand, I must take that seed away, or the eyes of those people will be opened, they will believe and be saved. Thus the devil himself bears testimony that it is the will of the Sower that those people should believe and be saved.

But since this is the Lord's will what can we make of the words: "*To others in parables; that seeing they might not see,*"

and hearing they might not understand." We must here not forget to what kind of people the Lord was speaking. He had preached to those people before, and He had not spoken to them in dark sayings, but in childlike words; for in his first chapter Mark informs us: "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God," but they received not His Word. Now He spake to them in parables which they could see and yet not see, which they could understand and yet not understand. They could understand the words seed, sowing, wayside, etc., but the parabolic, the hidden meaning thereof they could not understand. And the Lord spake to them in this manner to induce them to seek after the hidden meaning of His words, as the disciples did who came asking an explanation. If the multitude would have come asking further instruction they would have received it just as well as the disciples; for Jesus never rejected any one who came unto Him.

II.

If Satan cannot hinder the seed from taking root and beginning to grow in the heart his aim will next be to cause it to wither. Of the second class of hearers the parable says: "*Some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture.*" In explanation the Lord says: "*They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.*" On a rock with but a thin layer of soil seed will spring up very quickly, but hot sunshine and dry winds cause it to wither quickly. This class of hearers do truly believe for a while, but seeing a young and promising faith spring up is hateful to the enemy and he will do his best to cause the young Christian to fall into sin or to be offended at the cross of Christ. Many are the instances of awakenings which seemed to promise great things, but soon died away like young wheat on a rock is sined.

Why do many become backsliders so quickly? "*And these have no root.*" A shallow surface only was cultivated in them, and underneath the rock remained unbroken. They repent,

but not thoroughly. Hosea 7, 16, says of them: "They return, but not to the Most High: they are like a deceitful bow." Many are carried away by momentary emotions. The Word does lay hold on them and for a while it seems that they would become zealous and exemplary Christians, but it is all only superficial. In the depth of the heart, in the background of the soul the rocky soil remained unbroken, and when a heat, a temptation, an affliction comes they fall away. Therefore the prophet Joel 2, 13, exhorts: "Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God." Let the plough-share of the law penetrate deeply and turn up the soil thoroughly that the seed of the Gospel can strike firm root and can endure the drought when it comes.

III.

There is another danger to the growing seed, beside being consumed by the drought. "*And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it.*" Of these the Lord says in His explanation: "*That which fell among thorns, are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches, and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.*" Seed sown among thorns will not die so quickly as that on the rock, it may grow very luxuriantly for a while, but when the thorns begin to crowd it, then it turns yellow, becomes sickly and gradually dies. Therefore the Lord does not say of those among thorns that they bring no fruit at all, but they "*bring no fruit to perfection.*" They are true Christians, spiritually alive, and they begin to bring the fruits of the Spirit by walking in good works, but the thorns come up and they gain ground until they infest the whole heart. So the spiritual life is choked and the fruit unto salvation does not follow.

The thorns are all sins and evil lusts, of which the Lord specifies three: "*Cares and riches, and pleasures of this life.*" Indeed, three most dangerous thorns. Many turn to the Lord in all earnestness, and especially do many in their youth vow allegiance unto the Lord, in uprightness of heart pledging them-

selves to walk in the ways of the Lord to the end of their lives, but in after years they become entangled and choked in the cares of this life. They enter business, have much to occupy their mind, a household to care for, and the care for the soul becomes less until other cares have crowded it out; and though they remain church members and preserve the outward form of godliness, yet the spiritual life in them which was once so fresh and green, has died out, and it must be said of them as of the church at Sardis: "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."—With others the desire to gain a competence awakes, and they know, to be saving and to gather up the fragments is not wrong, but by and by their deceitful heart leads them beyond the line, their saving money is turned into craving money, and so the love of money gradually takes possession of their heart and the love of Christ is choked.—Others are lured by sensual lusts or worldly pleasures, and they say, it is allowable enjoyment, but they suffer it to draw them away from the care for the soul, and by and by fornication, intemperance or some other carnal vice fixes its hold on them, or the love of the world chokes the love of God in their hearts. This is the history of many thousands who once were the children of God, but who, like Solomon and Demas, suffered the thorns to grow up and to choke the spiritual life within them.

Because this is so we should, in turning to the Lord, be careful to root up all the thorns and to leave none remaining in the heart, as Jeremiah 4, 3, exhorts; "Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns." Turning unto the Lord, see that you bid farewell to every sin and then watch day after day lest rank thorns or vicious weeds grow up again. If you allow a place to the brier of intemperance, or the hawthorn of avarice, or the nightshade of carnal pleasure it will surely bring death to the inner man. Make it your practice frequently to scan the field of the heart with the eyeglass of the law, and when you discover a weed let there be no temporizing with it, that your heart may remain like to that ground of which the parable says:

IV.

"And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundred fold." Explaining this the Lord says: *"That on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience."* These are they who hear the Word, understand it, believe it, bring fruit to perfection and are saved. They are those who reach the end of faith, the salvation of the soul.

How can the Lord here say: *"And other fell on good ground,"* when the Scriptures testify that Adam *"begat a son in his own likeness,"* and: *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh?"* The Lord compares the hearts of these with good ground, not because they are good in themselves before the seed comes to them, or even because they are one whit better than the hearts of those by the wayside, but because the seed falls into them, makes them good ground and grows and brings fruit in them. That this is the meaning is unquestionable from the Lord's words to the disciples: *"Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God."* That the hearts of the disciples were a good soil was not of themselves, it was the gift of God.

It is the seed that makes the ground good and produces the fruit. Without the seed neither good ground, nor any fruit. If we would be good ground and bring fruit we must occupy ourselves continually with the Word. *"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."* We must hear the Word, read it, keep it and ponder it in our heart, and, surely, the soil will not be too hard for that seed, it will strike root and grow. Then when the seed has sprung up we are to bring forth fruit with patience. Where that seed is growing the weather will not always be fair, tempests will come, heat will fall upon it, tares will strive to choke it, but we should *"bring forth fruit with patience,"* knowing that the harvest will come, when they that sow in tears shall reap in joy, and they that went forth weeping shall bring their sheaves with rejoicing. Amen.

QUINQUAGESIMA.

TEXT: Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again. And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken. Luke 18, 31-34.

We again stand at the threshold of that period of the year which our forefathers set apart for the special consideration of the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, and which was regarded by them as a sacred time. Surely, a good and laudable ordinance of the church; for the suffering, death and rising again of the Lord is the very center of the whole work of our redemption and salvation. Any one who does not understand this part of Christ's work; any one who does not know wherefore Christ suffered, why He died and for what purpose He rose again, can nevermore understand the plan of salvation. Whosoever would come to a living knowledge of God and the Savior whom He has sent; whosoever would know the will of the Father and understand the work of the Son, must study the meaning of Christ's suffering, death and resurrection. So long as the disciples did not understand these things the Scriptures were a sealed book to them and their eyes were holden that they could not see the true glory of Jesus; for when He spake to them of His suffering and death "*this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.*" This is Christ's true glory, that through suffering and death He redeemed us from sin and death. For this the perfected saints ascribe unto Him everlasting glory, saying: "Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation," Rev. 5, 9, and Hebrews

9, 12, says: "By his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."

Without Christ's suffering, without the shedding of His blood and His death we would not be redeemed, because Divine justice required that the guilt of sin must be punished, the wages of sin must be paid, before mercy could be extended to sinners. Therefore when Peter in Gethsemane drew his sword to defend his Master, the Lord said unto him: "Put up thy sword into the sheath; the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" John 18, 11. Without the shedding of His blood there could be no forgiveness of sin; for the epistle to the Hebrews 9, 22, says: "Without shedding of blood is no remission," and of His blood alone does the Lord say: "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Matt. 26, 28. Without His death we would still be in the power of death, as it is written: "Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Hebr. 2, 14. Only because He died can we triumph over death, saying: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

If we would be Christians indeed, we must know and we must believe that Christ's sufferings, blood and death are the ransom with which we are bought from sin and death, the price with which life and salvation are purchased for us. This knowledge, certainty and faith should be written in our hearts with indelible letters that we would never lose sight of it, and especially that time of the year in which the Lord's death took place should we improve to make ourselves acquainted with these things. Let me to-day in a general way speak of

THE SUFFERING OF JESUS CHRIST, as

- I. a free-will suffering;
- II. a mirror of God's wrath against sin;
- III. a propitiation for sin.

I.

Descriptions of the life and death of Christ are now a very common thing. One often meets with traveling agents peddling such books, and it is almost become fashionable for every family to possess a life of Christ. Frequently people pay large prices for such books, and many of them are not worth the paper they are printed on. Some of the modern descriptions of the life of Christ are written by Infidels, some by Rationalists, and some by Christians. On an average the latter class may be recommended in a general way, but the two first classes are worth less than nothing, they are extremely dangerous. Although they may call Him the world's savior, yet they represent Christ, not as the true God incarnated for the redemption of man, but only as a pious and wise teacher of morals. Of His sufferings and shameful death they say, that the Jews hated Him on account of His doctrine, and because He would not deny the truth, He became a victim of His enemies. Were it true that Christ had not died of His own free will, but because He was overpowered by His enemies, then He could, of course, not be our Savior. But Jesus Christ did not die because He was overpowered by His enemies. He died according to the eternal counsel of God, as Peter plainly tells us in his Pentecost sermon: "Jesus of Nazareth, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." Acts 2, 23. The suffering of Christ was foreordained by the triune God, and He Himself was the almighty God. He did not become a victim to His enemies, He suffered of His own free will.

The Lord's willingness to suffer is very evident from our text; for He says: "*Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished.*" These words the Lord spake when on His last journey to Jerusalem. He knew what the prophets had foretold of Him; He was well aware of all that was to befall Him at Jerusalem; He told His disciples beforehand, saying: "*He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and*

shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated and spitted on; and they shall scourge him, and put him to death." Knowing this, why did He not turn back on His journey and go to Tyre or Damascus, and so avoid suffering and death? Why went he straightway to Jerusalem? He wanted to suffer and die; He went to Jerusalem to accomplish what the prophets had said of Him. Even when His enemies had come with staves and swords to take Him, it was still in His power to escape their hands; for when Peter drew the sword He said: "Thinkest thou that I cannot pray to my Father, and He shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be? Matt. 26, 52. If it had not been His will to suffer and die, all the armies of Rome could not have overpowered Him; no steel nail on earth could have transfixed Him to the cross.

O a comforting fact that Christ suffered of His own free will! If He had suffered because He became a victim to His enemies, if He had been powerless to help Himself, then His suffering would have been no manifestation of love; for what is done unwillingly does not proceed from love; but because He willingly laid down His life, we know that He has a heart full of love for us. Knowing what cup of bitterness He must drink at Jerusalem, He, nevertheless, hastened to that city. Willingly, heartily, joyfully did He suffer, as He testifies by David: "Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God." Ps. 40, 7. He delighted in suffering.

II.

Because Christ suffered of His own free will, because He went to Jerusalem there to suffer and to die, He must certainly have had some great object in view. For nothing and to no purpose no one will voluntarily subject himself to suffering and death. Why did Christ suffer? what mean His anguish, grief and torment? wherefore His struggle with death? These are the questions which we must be able to answer, otherwise we are like the disciples who "*understood none of these things.*"

What did the disciples not understand? They knew the meaning of the words to be mocked, spitted on, scourged and put to death, but they did not understand why Christ must suffer these things. They thought the kingdom of Christ would be a kingdom of military power, worldly honors and riches. By Him they expected to be made lords of the earth, and blinded by this error it was to them an incomprehensible saying that He must suffer and be put to death in so shameful a manner.

As the disciples at that time, so in our days many that are called Christians, do not understand the object of Christ's suffering. Reading the history of His passion they know what the words mean, they can tell, how cruelly He was treated, but the cause and object of His suffering is to them a hidden thing, and even though they are told that He suffered for the sins of the world, they have no true knowledge of what sin is, or what it is to suffer for sin. Some consider the sufferings of Christ so that they become exasperated at His tormenters. Now the rejection of Christ by the Jews and His crucifixion by the Gentiles was certainly an abominable act; but those who so consider the Lord's sufferings as to become angry at the Jews, show that they do not understand the counsel of God and, in fact, are of kindred mind with the Jews; for they think, *they* would never have been capable of doing so wicked an act. They are of the same mind with the Pharisees who also said: "If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets." Matt. 23, 30. Those do not regard the sufferings of Christ right who say in their hearts, they could not have acted so wickedly as the Jews did; for they know not the depravity of their own hearts. Others consider the suffering of Christ so as to pity Him. They feel compassion for Him and perhaps are moved to tears, because He was so shamefully treated. These look only upon the Lord's sufferings and forget that He did it willingly. Christ does not need our compassion, nor does He want to be pitied by us. To those women, weeping over Him on the way to Calvary, He said: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For if they

do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" Luke 23, 28. We are not to pity Christ as we pity others in distress.

To look upon the sufferings of Christ rightly and fruitfully we must remember what it was that caused Him suffering, and for what purpose He suffered. Why was He smitten and afflicted? Suffering is the consequence of sin. Had not sin come into the world there would be no suffering. Where suffering, there sin. Was then Christ so great a sinner, because He suffered so much? "He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth." Is. 53, 9. Yet He had sins, not of His own, but the sins of others. He had more sins than you and I together; for He took upon Himself the sins of the world. He was so loaded and covered with sin that St. Paul directly pronounces Him sin, saying: "God hath made him to be sin for us." 2 Cor. 5, 21. He was "holy, undefiled, separate from sinners," but "the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." Our sins were the cause of His suffering and, knowing this, we should well consider how He suffered. So heavily did the load of sin press upon Him that in the garden His sweat was like great drops of blood falling to the ground, and an angel came to strengthen Him; and on the cross, enveloped in darkness, from sheer anguish of spirit He screamed: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The capacity of our mind is far too limited to imagine the vastness, the height and the depth of that suffering which extorted a scream of agony from the soul of Him who suffered willingly and who possessed almighty power to support Him. Must not sin be an abomination in the sight of God? Must not His anger against unrighteousness burn like a fiery oven, since He punishes sin so terribly in His only begotten Son? Would you learn how heavy a burden sin is? Go to Gethsemane; there your sins bow down to the ground the Creator of all things. Do you want to know whether God is angry at sin and will punish it? Ascend Mount Calvary; there the Father delivered His own Son into the bonds of death for the punishment of sin. Would you know what it cost the Son of God to make atonement for

sin? Picture His sufferings to your mind, as the Lord Himself describes them in the 40th Psalm, lamenting: "Innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; therefore my heart faileth me." Behold, how heavily your sins lay on the shoulders of Christ and learn here, what sin deserves in the sight of God, and what dire judgment will fall upon you, if you repent not of sin and turn to Christ.

This is the first lesson we are to learn from the sufferings of Christ: the knowledge of sin and God's wrath against sin. There are many who do confess that they are sinners, but they do so, as it were, with a toss of the head. They do not count it so very great an evil to be a sinner. They do not look on sin as something odious before God, such a violation of divine justice which brings infinite guilt and deserves unending punishment; they rather count sin only a fault, a defect of nature which man could not help and which God would overlook. But whosoever thinks thus lightly of sin is yet blind and does not understand the sufferings of Christ and the justice of God. To make light of sin is itself one of the most dreadful sins; for to regard sin an insignificant and trivial thing is imputing great foolishness to the Son of God for suffering innumerable evils only to make satisfaction for a mere defect of nature; it is accusing God the Father of injustice for inflicting excessive punishment on His Son for a small matter. Surely, sin is not merely a defect, it is a reality. God does verily not regard sin a trivial thing, or He would not have humbled His own Son, who had agreed to suffer the punishment of sin, so low that He must die so painful and shameful a death at the hands of the executioner. Whenever we consider the sufferings of Christ we should do so praying with that blind man by the wayside: "*Lord, that I may receive my sight,*" with seeing eyes to see the depth of my depravity, the heinousness of my transgressions and the wrath in store for me if I do not hate and forsake sin.

So the passion of Christ pictures sin and God's wrath against sin in vivid and fiery characters, and considering the history of His passion we should lay to heart what dire poison the seed

of the Serpent is, since it cost God's own Son His life's blood to atone for it.

III.

But when we have come to a lively knowledge of our sins, we must not despair in them, as did Judas Iscariot, but we should further consider the object of Christ's passion, that He suffered and died in our sins, and bare our transgressions that we might go free. He suffered as our Representative. "The chastisement of our peace was upon him." He was chastened that we might have peace. He suffered that we should be free. This is the foundation and pillar of our faith and hope.

Christ did not suffer in His own sins; He had no sins of His own; He suffered in the sins of the world, that is of the whole human race. Unto Him, the second Adam, the sins of the whole human family were reckoned. "As by the offense of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation: even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." Rom. 5, 18. As Adam brought suffering upon all, so Christ suffered for all; as in Adam the sentence of death was passed on all, so in Christ the justification of life is acquired for all. Therefore Christ so frequently calls Himself the "Son of man," because in Him the whole race of men is represented. From this it incontrovertibly follows that there is not a single individual on the whole face of the earth, for whom Christ did not suffer, because He suffered for Adam and his children. If Satan would sift you and say: Yea, how do you know that Christ has suffered for you? you may boldly answer: Get thee hence, Satan; or canst thou bring proof that I am not a descendant of Adam? In the sufferings of the second Adam the children of the first Adam all have part. Christ suffered for me just as well as He did for St. Peter; for I am a descendant of Adam as well as Peter. From Christ's being the second Adam it follows, that He suffered for all sins of all men, hence for all sins of each one individually; for, as from the one sin of the first Adam all sins originated, so the one passion of the second Adam is for all sins. Do not permit

Satan to torment you with scruples like this: Christ did suffer for sins, but how can you know, if He suffered for that sin which you committed then and there. There is no sin for which Christ did not suffer; for as all sins originated from the first Adam, so all sins centred on the shoulders of the second Adam. From Christ's being the second Adam it also follows that His atonement is valid in heaven; for as by the sin of the first Adam death comes, so by the suffering of the second Adam life is obtained. To deny the former, that by the first Adam death came into the world, would be outright madness. Now as true as the first is, even so true is the latter, that by the passion of the second Adam life is acquired.

Therefore I conclude, and God grant that my words may find a place in your hearts: Jesus Christ was your Substitute; He stood in your stead; He suffered the punishment of your sins; for the sake of His suffering there is life in store for you. You ought to have suffered for your sins, but God accounted them to Christ, and punished them in Him that you should be free from suffering. Hold to this Jesus Christ, and in eternity you will know no suffering; "for God hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." Amen.

I. SUNDAY IN LENT.

TEXT: Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterwards a hungered. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and behold, angels came and ministered unto him. Matt. 4, 1-11.

This Gospel, treating of the fasting and temptation of Christ, is read in the church on this Sunday, because it is the first Sunday in Lent, which season the ancient church set apart for the special contemplation of Christ's suffering and death. But as so many other good and edifying customs of antiquity this too was perverted under popery. Under the plea that Christians ought to follow Christ, a forty days' fasting was introduced as something meritorious before God, and so the hearts of the people were led away from the sufferings of Christ, and were directed to their own works for righteousness. From Ash Wednesday to Easter the pope has forbidden the eating of meat, and he says, whosoever would eat meat during this season were guilty of a sin unto death. Though this fasting of the Papists has an appearance of piety, yet in fact and reality it is a vain and wicked thing. By their fasting they hope to earn the favor of God, but the Scriptures declare that man is justified by grace through faith alone, without the deeds of the law.

Though a man would fast himself to death, he could not thereby merit the forgiveness of one single sin; and because by the Papistic fasting the central truth of the Gospel is denied, it is not strange that St. Paul pronounces the command "to abstain from meats which God has created to be received with thanksgiving" a "doctrine of devils." 1 Tim. 4, 3. And the fasting of the Romanists is nothing but hypocrisy. To abstain from meat, but to fill the body with fish and all manner of delicacies, is no fasting at all.

When the pope, to justify his command, appeals to the fasting of Christ, he does so without any reason whatever. Christ did fast forty days and forty nights, but He did not say we should do so likewise. And He really fasted, that is, for forty days and forty nights He neither ate nor drank, and herein no one can imitate Him. Neither does He want it imitated. He did many things which we are not to do and can not do. Christ's fasting was a part of His work of redemption. He fasted to atone for the lustfulness of our first parents, and in general to make satisfaction for all sins of intemperance in eating and drinking. He shed His blood for the remission of sins, and this we can not imitate; He fasted to atone for the sins of gluttony and drunkenness, and this too we can not imitate.

Yet fasting, if performed in the right sentiment, is a good and wholesome practice. Scripture mentions three kinds of fasting. The first is the spiritual fasting, which consists in abstaining from sins and crucifying the lusts of the flesh; and without this spiritual fasting all bodily fasting is nothing but hypocrisy, as God said unto Israel by the prophet: "Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens; and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?" Is. 58, 5. The other kind of fasting is, when a Christian for a certain time, either takes no nourishment, or very little, not with the intention of performing a meritorious

work, but in order to be better prepared for the subduing of carnal lusts and for prayer. This kind of fasting must not be commanded, it must be voluntary, if it is to be right; for Scripture leaves it to the free choice of each one, whether, when and how he chooses to fast. A third kind of fasting is that which God imposes, when He afflicts a Christian with poverty that from lack of food he must fast, or when God prostrates him on a sick-bed, so that food becomes repugnant to him; and in this kind of fasting patience is required that with resignation we receive what God sees fit to send. These are the three kinds of fasting which the Scriptures mention, but of fasting as a meritorious work the Bible knows nothing, save alone the fasting of Jesus Christ. To Him belongs the honor that His fasting alone is meritorious, yea, of infinite value before God the Father. And His fasting we should not seek to imitate, we should appropriate it through faith, believing that, because He fasted, our souls are spared eternal starvation.

But there in the wilderness Christ did not only suffer bodily starvation, at the same time He was tormented by the tempter. Let us therefore consider:

THE TEMPTING OF CHRIST BY SATAN.

He suffered the temptations of Satan:

- I. For our redemption;
- II. For our instruction.

I.

This text narrates a wonderful occurrence, which may well awaken our astonishment: Satan tempting the Son of God to sin. Satan, the chief of those fallen angels of whom St. Jude writes that they are "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day," Satan dares draw nigh unto Jesus Christ "who is over all, God blessed forever," to tempt Him to sin! And not only does Satan undertake to tempt Christ, he goes about it in a bold, overbearing, arrogant manner, as though he were Christ's equal, or even His superior. "*If*," he says, "*if thou be the Son of God, command*

that these stones be made bread." With what boldness he pronounces it an uncertain thing if Jesus be the Son of God or not! With what presumption does he undertake to teach Christ ways and means how to help Himself out of His distress! With still greater impudence he takes Christ and leads Him about; for plainly does the text say: "*Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee; and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.*" The devil quotes the Scriptures, but in a mutilated form, just as though Christ were so ignorant as not to notice it. And finally the devil crowns his arrogance by showing Christ the glory of the world and saying: "*All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.*" Surely, an amazing thing that Satan dare presume to ask the Son of God to fall down and to worship him.

How could this thing be? While an absolute monarch is sitting on his throne no lawyer can undertake to indict him; for the monarch is sovereign and is not subject to the law; but when that monarch voluntarily steps down from his throne and takes the place of a criminal, then a lawyer can indict him as being subject to the law. And because that monarch has agreed to become the substitute of a criminal, he is no more entitled to employ his absolute power to set aside the law, but having placed himself under the law he has bound himself to use only legal means in his defense. Even so here. Satan could not ascend up to heaven to tempt the Son of God there, but when the Son of God had come down from heaven and had become the substitute of sinners, then Satan could approach Him with his temptings, and he did not fail to make use of his opportunity.

Why did the Son of God suffer Himself to be assailed by Satan, to be led about and contemptuously and mockingly treated by him? Must He not have had some great object in view, some great end to attain, because He submitted to this indignity? Truly had He a great object in view, a great prize

to contend for. We must not regard the Lord's battle with Satan a matter of minor importance; for without this conflict the Lord could not have redeemed us. Wherefore He suffered the temptings of Satan is indicated in the first verse of our text: "*Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.*" When was this? Why immediately after His baptism. At His baptism He was visibly anointed with the Holy Ghost unto the public performance of His office of redeeming the human race, and His first performance was, that He went to the wilderness, there to begin the struggle with the chief enemy. He was come to destroy the works of the devil, to take from him his armor, and to deliver us who were the captives of Satan; and so soon as He was anointed unto this office with the Holy Ghost by God the Father, He went to meet the enemy, and there in the wilderness the devil made his first great onset upon Him. He contended with Satan in His capacity as the Son of man, the Representative of the race, the second Adam. The same we learn from the Lord's answers to the tempting offers of the devil. He did not employ His divine power against the devil, but to withstand his assaults He used only that weapon which is given to men, the Word of God. This shows conclusively that He contended with Satan as our Representative and Redeemer.

Using His divine power Christ could in a single moment have banished Satan with all his host of evil spirits from this earth, but then man would not have been redeemed from sin and guilt. Man's redemption, if it was to be accomplished at all, had to be accomplished agreeably to the word recorded in the 1st chapter of Isaiah, v. 27: "Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness." Redemption had to be accomplished in a legal way and not by violence. This point is easily illustrated. If a man has been sentenced to prison by due process of law, it will not do to free him by violence. Though a mob break the jail and set the man at liberty, yet he is not *legally* free. He is at large, but the law still holds its claim on him. To make the man legally free another process of law must be inaugurated and he must be pro-

nounced free by the proper authorities according to the statutes of the commonwealth. The redemption of man had to be accomplished with judgment and righteousness, according to law and justice, and not by force. The legal claim which Satan had on man had to be taken from him. Therefore Jesus did not use His divine power against Satan, but only the written Word of God; for the first Adam had fallen into the power of the devil, because by unbelief he set aside this weapon, God's Word and command; therefore the second Adam had to cope with Satan with this weapon to overcome him.

And by the Word He did overcome, repelling every assault of the tempter. First he sought to instill doubt of the Father's Word into the mind of Jesus, saying: "*If thou be the Son of God command that these stones be made bread.*" According to the connection Satan meant to say: Some time ago on the banks of Jordan a voice from heaven was heard saying of thee: "This is my beloved Son." But it seems doubtful, whether that voice spake the truth; for here thou art in the wilderness, forsaken and starving, and how canst thou be the Son of God. Try it and see, if thou really dost possess divine power; for if so, then it will cost thee but a word and these stones will be turned into bread. Under these circumstances trying would have implied doubt, but Jesus answered: "*It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*" Instead of giving place to doubt Jesus said, He could, if need be, live by the Word of His Father without bread. When he failed to seduce Jesus to doubt the Father's Word, Satan sought to lead Him to presumptuous trust, to rely on the protection of God where it was not promised, but Jesus replied: "*It is written again, thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*" There was a stairway by which to come down from the temple, and jumping down was a way which God had commanded no one to go. Even so that greatest and grandest offer of Satan, to give Him the dominion of the world, did Jesus meet with the Word, saying: "*It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*"

Here was a battle on the result of which depended the weal

or woe not of a city or nation only, but of the human race; and Satan, surely, exerted all his power, cunning and craftiness to seduce the second Adam also, and so to keep his spoil forever. As the evangelist Luke informs us he tempted the Lord during all the forty days of His fasting, and at the end of those days he made another great onslaught, but he was met at every point, and, as a vanquished general, he had to quit the field. He left the Lord only for a season; he returned again to renewed attempts; but if with the first Adam his victory had been easy, in the second Adam Satan found his Master. Particularly of one more instance do we read that Satan came to act against the Lord. In his 15th chapter St. John writes: "When Jesus had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot. And after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly." Then Judas went to contract with the high priests. It was Satan who incited Judas to betray the Lord, but after Judas had gone out, Jesus said: "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me." It appears, when Satan found that he could not seduce Jesus, he at last in blind rage resolved to incite Judas and his helpers to put Jesus to death, and in this the devil was successful, but thereby his own kingdom was destroyed.

Behold here the fulfillment of the word which God had spoken four thousand years before to the Serpent in paradise concerning the woman's Seed: "It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." The devil tormented Christ with his temptings, he incited men to persecute and to put Him to death, but the third day it suddenly became manifest who was the victor, that Christ through the very bruises which He suffered had truly redeemed our race and had crushed the head of the old Serpent. What consternation must have seized on Satan and his angels, when Christ suddenly appeared in their infernal abode, triumphantly to proclaim His victory to all the hosts of hell! Whose is the victory? It is Jesus Christ's. And who is Christ? He is the Son of man in whom was represented the human race, who stood in the battle in our place, as our Substitute. So the victory is ours, as Paul exults: "Thanks

be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. 15, 57. Because the victory is ours, let us arise, let us grasp this Jesus Christ with the hand of faith, and holding Him up to the enemy, let us say: The field is mine; behold here my Substitute; for when Christ is held up to him Satan must flee.

II.

But a vanquished general, though the decisive battle be lost, will not immediately surrender everything; he will strive to hold what territory he can and will seek to regain lost ground. Such are Satan's tactics after Christ has taken from him his right and power over the human race. He strives to hold what territory he can, and indeed he holds the great majority of men in his service; not because he has power to do so—that power Christ has taken from him—; but because men love darkness rather than light. Those, too, who through faith in Christ have escaped his kingdom, the devil seeks to win back again, and he has many ways and means to fascinate and to ensnare the souls of men. The Lord tells us that when the evil spirit is cast out of a house, he soon returns to see, if he might not gain entrance again; and Peter admonishes: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." 1 Pet. 5, 8. We who believe in Jesus Christ must remember that the devil is our adversary and is continually on the watch for an opportunity to regain us for his kingdom. Therefore we should study to know his practices, how he is accustomed to assail the heart, and we should hold ourselves equipped with the right weapons to ward him off.

And where could we have a better pattern for our instruction than in Christ Himself? He indeed suffered the temptations of Satan for our redemption, and this we are to believe that His struggle with and His victory over Satan is our salvation; yet at the same time His temptations are an ensample for us. From Him we may learn how to resist the devil and to triumph over him. Hebrews, in the fourth chapter, it is said of our High Priest: "He was in all points tempted like as we are." If He was tempted like as we, then we are tempted like as He; and

being tempted like as He, we must meet the temptations and overcome the tempter in like manner as He did.

But there is one point here in which we are not to imitate Christ, because He has commanded us the contrary. Jesus went to the wilderness "*to be tempted of the devil.*" He was come into the world to overcome the enemy and He courted temptation, but we are taught to pray: "Lead us not into temptation," and if we so pray we must certainly not expose ourselves to temptation, but must avoid it as much as possible. The sly old Serpent is like an angler. An expert angler knows what kind of bait is enticing to certain kinds of fish. With that bait the angler throws out his hook, calculating that the fish's lust after that bait will cause him to take the hook. Now the fish keeping at a distance from the bait are safe, but the one that eyes it and keeps encircling it is enticed closer and closer and is finally caught. Satan knows the propensities of the human heart and he lays out his bait counting on that lust of which St. James 1, 14, writes: "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed." Places and occasions where the tempter lays out his bait we should avoid as much as we can, remembering that those who expose themselves to temptation are apt to fall in it. Stand not at the show windows in front of theatres, lest the carnal lust awake in your heart and overcome you. Keep not eyeing the attractions of the saloon, lest you be fascinated, but remember there is a hook in the glass which, when it has once fastened itself upon you, will draw you into deep waters and will drown you. "Be sober, be vigilant: because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."

Rise, my soul, to watch, and pray,
From thy slumber wake thee,
Lest at last the evil day
Suddenly o'ertake thee;
For the Foe, Well we know,
Oft his harvest reapeth,
While the Christian sleepeth.

Learn here with what weapon to resist the devil. "*It is written,*" that is the only effectual weapon, and with it we

should be ready to meet the tempter at every point. If the devil would make it appear to you as though God was not your gracious father, insist: "*It is written.*" "God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3, 16. If the devil would persuade you to accept that for divine truth which is not the Word of God, remember: "*It is written.*" "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed." John 8, 31. If the devil would make this world, its honors, treasures and pleasures very attractive to you, answer: "*It is written.*" "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever." 1 John 2, 17. Whatever the temptation may be, ward it off with the sword of the Word. The Word is the weapon which the Lord used, and it is the only one infallible weapon which we have. If we let go the Word our protection is gone, but whosoever holds and uses the Word, will always find it the power of God.

One thing more, and something very comforting, do we learn from our text. The devil can proceed no further with his temptings than the Lord suffers him to go. When the devil had fulfilled the measure of his temptations the Lord said unto him: "*Get thee hence, Satan.*" The devil is like a chained watchdog, which can go to the length of his chain, and no further. Concerning Job Satan complained before the Lord saying: "Hast not thou made a hedge about him on every side?" God had made a hedge around Job that Satan could not do one thing against him; and when God moved that hedge, drawing the circle narrower, yet the devil could not do one thing more to Job than God permitted him. That same Lord who in hot battle affray took our souls from Satan is still our defense against the enemy, and under the shadow of His protection let us trust; for we have His Word and promise by the holy apostle, saying: "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." 1 Cor. 10, 13. **Amen.**

II. SUNDAY IN LENT.

TEXT: Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour. Matt. 15, 21-28.

In the Gospel of the preceding Sunday our hearts were delighted to see our Lord Jesus Christ, the Captain of our salvation, battle with the Prince of darkness in the wilderness and triumph over that mighty foe. This text tells us of another contest of the Lord, but a contest of a very different nature, a contest in which the Lord Himself is overcome. Comparing these two debates we cannot but find a strong contrast in them. In the contest with Satan, that cunning and mighty prince, the Lord overcomes; in the contest with this poor Gentile woman the Lord is overcome. The solution of this seemingly strange thing is not hard to find, and it is highly instructive and wonderfully comforting. With Satan the Lord battled to destroy his works and to deliver us from his power, and He was victorious and has redeemed us from the power of the devil; but against this woman the Lord did not contend as against an enemy whom He wanted to destroy, He debated with her from love and mercy toward her, for her own benefit, to promote her in the saving knowledge and in faith. The Lord was not against this woman, He only behaved so in order to try her faith, and

when she stood the test He gave in and so acknowledged Himself overcome.

By what did this woman overcome the Lord? Not by greater wisdom or more skillful argumentation; for the Lord is wiser than men. The Lord Himself names the weapon with which she prevailed, when He says: "*O woman, great is thy faith.*" The Lord was trying her faith; through faith she wrestled with Him, and by faith she overcame Him and wrung from Him the answer: "*Be it unto thee even as thou wilt.*" Through faith the Christian contends with God and overcomes. This was represented by the patriarch Jacob's bodily wrestling with the Angel of the Covenant. Although Jacob's hip was disjuncted he did not let the Lord go, and when the Lord said: "Let me go" Jacob answered: "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Gen. 32, 26. Then the Lord acknowledged Himself overcome, and He blessed him, saying: "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." As Jacob did not let the Lord go until he had obtained what he asked, so faith holds fast the Lord and will not let Him go until He give ear and answer its petition. Faith has the promise: "All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." Matt. 21, 22. By faith the Lord is overcome. Faith is the victory which prevails with God, triumphs over all enemies, overcomes afflictions and death, and saves the soul.

What is that faith which does such great things? This is pictured to us by a plain example in our text, presenting

THE FAITH OF THE CANAANITE WOMAN A SAMPLE OF THE TRUE CHRISTIAN FAITH.

- I. What her faith was;
- II. How it was approved.

I.

If we examine, what the faith of this woman was, we may define it in these few words: She received the Word which she heard of Him in a believing heart, and she claimed for herself

what Jesus had come to do for the afflicted. This was her trust, her confidence that Jesus would help her.

In this text we again find the Lord journeying; for it says: "*Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.*" The occasion for this distant journey was a debate which Jesus had with the Pharisees who taught, to eat with unwashed hands would defile a man, and they accused Him of breaking the traditions of the elders by allowing His disciples to eat without washing. But He replied: "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your traditions?" Matt. 15, 3. That is certainly wickedness to supplant the Word and command of God by the traditions of men, and against this dreadful sin the Lord solemnly warned the Pharisees and all the people, saying: "Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up." But the Pharisees would not discard the traditions of their elders, and where the traditions of men prevail Jesus departs. When the Jews would not receive His teaching He turned toward the boundaries of the Gentiles, indicating to the disciples, they should first preach the Gospel to the Jews and, finding no faith with them, they should shake the dust from off their feet and should turn to the Gentiles.

Those who do not want Christ and His Word can soon be rid of Him. Dr. Luther very aptly compares the true Gospel with a summer shower which falls now at one place, then at another, but nowhere stays long, because the ingratitude of men will not let the Word remain. We now have the right Gospel abundantly. Let us appreciate it while we have it, or it surely will be taken from us and will be given to others who will bring forth the fruits thereof.

God demands eyes and hands
Open for the offers
He so richly proffers.

God has His Word preached that people should turn from darkness to light, but if they will love the darkness more than the light He takes His Word and goes to others. The countries of

Asia once had the Word, they now have the Turk. Rome had it, now it has the pope. We have it, so let us buy while the market is at the door. The Lord will have a church upon earth at all times, and if one nation refuses to be His people He turns to another. When the Galileans would not hear Him the Lord turned Himself about and wended His way toward the coasts of Tyre and Sidon; for there He knew a soul that did want Him. As surely as He turns from those who do not want Him, so surely does He come unto those who do desire Him. This Canaanite woman did crave His help, and He dreaded not the long journey to go to her neighborhood.

Living near the Jewish boundary this woman had long since been acquainted with the religion of the Jews. She knew the promises which were given this people, that they were looking for a Savior to come from the lineage of David; a Savior in whom the Gentiles too would have part. Whether she formerly had believed in the God of Israel we are not told, but that she was acquainted with the promises of the prophets is evident from her words when crying after the Lord: "*Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David.*" So this Gentile woman could not have spoken, if she had not known the promises of the prophets.

But the Father was minded to draw this woman to the Son, or nearer unto His Son, and for this purpose He suffered a great affliction to come upon her. Her daughter was bodily possessed of a devil, that is, an evil spirit had power over the maiden's members to use them as he pleased. We can well understand that this mother's longing was to be delivered from this dire affliction, but where should help be found? The idols, the priests, the doctors could not help her; but the rumor came to her that Jesus of Nazareth was going about in Judea and Galilee casting out devils and healing all manner of sick, and through this rumor the faith was kindled in her heart that this Jesus was the promised Savior and with Him she would find help. So the Word begets faith and faith trusts to find that in Jesus Christ which the Word promises. The Word, faith, and Christ belong together and can not be separated. The Word

kindles faith, faith grasps Christ, and Christ brings help and salvation; that is the golden chain. When we receive the Word of the cross in faith Jesus cannot remain distant, He comes and makes His abode with us.

To obtain help from the Lord this woman came out of the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. The text does not say that the Lord crossed the line, but the woman came into the land of Israel. To find Christ you must come out of the coasts of the heathen. So long as you continue to live in sin and wickedness you are within the coasts of the heathen, and there you will not find Christ; for He will not dwell in heathenish hearts. To have the Lord with you, you must depart from the way of the heathen, you must purge out the leaven of malice and wickedness, and must walk no more after the lusts of the flesh. You must do with sin as Abraham did with Lot when there was strife between their herdsmen; for Abraham said to Lot: "Separate thyself from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left." Gen. 13, 9. The Christian faith and a heathenish life will not go together. Ye servants of sin, awake, and come out of the coasts of the heathen.

So this woman believed that Jesus was the Helper come from God; she believed that He was truly a helper who did and would help the afflicted, and she believed that He was *her helper who would help her* out of her affliction. What Jesus was come to do for all and what He did do for others, this woman claimed for herself, and she had no doubt that He would help her also, as He had helped so many others.

Behold here what the right, justifying and saving faith is, that faith which secures the help for the soul. As the fame of Jesus came to that woman, so the Gospel of Christ is proclaimed to us, and what does the Gospel tell us? It tells us that the Son of God came into the world to save sinners; it tells us that Christ made full atonement for all sins of all men; that He has earned righteousness before God for all, and "that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." Now what must I believe in order that I may be justi-

fied from sin and possess righteousness and life? Why, I must believe what the Gospel says concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ: that He is the Father's own Son, the true God; that this everlasting Son of the Father became the Son of man and offered Himself a sacrifice for all the children of men, and that He is a Savior who truly does save from sin and eternal death. He that does not believe these things can not have the Christian faith; for the Lord says: "He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." John 3, 36. He that does not believe what the Son testifies of Himself and His work can not have justifying faith. Yet merely to believe that all is true what the Gospel proclaims, is not sufficient unto my personal justification. To believe in a general way that the Son of God became man and suffered and died for the salvation of men will not yet bring *me* into the possession of the forgiveness of sins. If this woman had only believed that Christ was the helper of the afflicted, and there her faith would have stopped, she would never have procured help for her daughter. Faith must go a step farther, and must appropriate Christ for its own. I must believe that He is *my* Savior who saves *me*. What He did for all I must appropriate as done for me individually. The conclusion which faith makes is this: Christ gave Himself a ransom for all; so He gave Himself a ransom for me; Christ came to seek and to save those lost in sin; I am lost in sin; so Christ is come to seek and to save me; Christ as the Lamb of God taketh away the sins of the world; now I am part of the world; so Christ taketh away *my* sins; Christ is come to be the righteousness of the unrighteous; I am unrighteous; so Christ is come to be *my* righteousness. In this manner faith appropriates all to itself, as Luther so beautifully expresses it in the catechism: "I believe that Jesus Christ has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil." Faith says: Me He has redeemed, me He has purchased, and so faith speaks in all simplicity. "Except ye be converted," says the Lord, "and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Matt. 18, 3.

The Christian's faith is similar to a child's faith. When a father is dividing gifts, what will a little child say? Why it will hold out its hand and will say: "*Me too.*" *Me too*, that is what faith says; *me too* Christ loves, *me too* He saves. This *me too* comprises the very substance of faith. For this we have a most striking example in David who says: "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." Ps. 32, 5. And again he charges his soul: "Bless the Lord, O my soul; who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases." Ps. 103, 3. The same child-like simplicity appears in the words of Paul, saying: "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." Gal. 2, 20. Of this *me too* faith is confident; it has no doubts or scruples about it. If some one, when this woman was on the way to the Lord, would have said to her, Jesus would help others, but not her, she would have sped on exclaiming: *Me too*. Faith is the certainty: I, even I am an heir of God through my Lord Jesus Christ. As God in the sacraments individualizes His grace and promise, as it were, saying: Thou that art now baptized with water shalt be my child; thou that now eatest and drinkest, thy sins be forgiven thee; as God by the sacraments certifies His promise to the individual, as though saying: Thou that receivest the sacrament, even thou shalt be certain and not doubt that I am thy gracious Father; so faith accepts it as all its own; it claims for itself Christ with all His merits. Faith is the assurance: My Savior is mine and I am His, and of this faith is fully persuaded, saying: He has said it, and He has certified it to me. The man who so claims for and appropriates to himself the universal redemption and the salvation prepared for all, whose heart insists that it is all his, he has the right, justifying and saving faith.

II.

So soon as this certain persuasion is in the heart, though it be but a glimmering spark, it possesses all grace and all salvation. But if faith begins small, as it usually does, it is not to

remain small, it is to grow and become great, in order to withstand temptations without which it cannot remain. And how otherwise could faith become approved than by trials and temptations? The Christian's faith is like unto a spark of fire. If no draft strikes it, it glimmers for a little while and then dies, but if a current of air falls upon it, it brightens up and may become a great fire. Because faith, to grow and to become approved, must be exercised in trials, therefore God suffers all His Christians to be tempted by the enemies: the flesh, the world and the devil; yea, often God Himself tries His children, not to destroy them, or to torment them, but to lead them on from faith to faith. For this we here have a very plain example. This woman comes to Christ in the cheerful confidence that He will help her; for she knows from the prophets and has heard from reports that He is a ready helper to all that call upon Him. In this confidence she calls after Him, but He walks on as though He had no ears to hear. This woman had flesh and blood as we all have, and her reason, doubtless, argued that she had been mistaken in her confidence; for now she could see that this man was not a merciful helper, but a hard man who would not even listen to the cries of the unfortunate. But strongly as her own heart may have tempted her to turn back, she kept on in her cries, and the disciples came to her aid, saying: "*Send her away; for she crieth after us.*" But this intercession of the disciples appeared rather to make bad worse; for the Lord answered: "*I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*" Most likely these words were spoken in the hearing of the woman, and they sounded as though He meant to say, with this Gentile woman He would have nothing to do. If she heard these words she must have been tempted to say: Is that the way? To the Jews He is a merciful helper, but not to me, because I am a Gentile woman. But by this rebuff her confidence was not broken. She came and kneeling before the Lord she said: "*Lord, help me.*" But now came the unkindest thrust of all; for He answered: "*It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.*" This was as much as to say, the Jews were the children, the Gentiles were

dogs, and He must first give the children bread before He could pay any attention to the dogs. Might we not expect this woman to have retorted with flashing eyes, if He would not help her He need at least not insult her? But even this severest thrust she bore bravely, yea she caught the Lord in His own words, saying: "*Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table.*" She wanted only dog's-right, to pick up a stray crumb. And now the Lord was overcome and had to yield.

Indeed, this woman's faith was great, and we may well ask, wherein lies the secret of her strength and perseverance? Several circumstances serve to make this plain. We observe in the text that the Lord never directly denied her request. At first He said neither yea, nor nay, and this looked hard. Then He said that He was only sent to the house of Israel, but He did not say that this woman should have no part with Israel; and finally He compared her with a dog, but did not say that she should not have a dog's right, and this still left her room to claim the right of a dog. The Lord's behavior looked unkind and His words sounded hard, but they always left room for hope, and this woman always put the best construction on them. How could she put a good construction on things which looked so much the other way, when naturally the human heart is so much inclined and so quick to put the worst construction on everything? She could do this, because she had something more certain to go by than appearances. She had the Word of the prophets that Christ would be a merciful helper to all, and this was established by His former acts, the fame of which she had heard. This Word she believed. She doubted not, this Word must be true and the Lord would and must have mercy upon her. Therefore when His behavior appeared to be at variance with the Word she trusted the Word more than appearances.

Thanks be to God that the history of the Lord's behavior toward this woman is transcribed for us. Here is a strong staff for all those to lean on whom God suffers to be tried in high, spiritual temptations of the soul. These severest of all trials

come upon the Christian when God behaves towards him as the Lord did toward this woman. A Christian cries unto God for help, but there is no response; he continues his cries, but his prayers seem to vanish away in thin air. Then he perhaps remembers that the Lord said: "If two of you shall agree on earth, as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven," Matt. 18, 19, and relying on this Word he goes to other pious Christians, asking them to unite their prayers with his, yet there is no answer. Then it begins to appear to him as though God had forsaken him, as though the Lord had turned against him, and instead of finding peace and rest he finds only greater unrest. Perhaps he even begins to be tormented with the thought that he is none of God's elect, but a castaway; or he might have committed that unpardonable sin which can not be forgiven neither in this world nor in the world to come, and therefore God would not hear his prayers. Those are high and fiery trials which not all Christians experience, or not all in the same measure, but they that have passed through them know that the greatest bodily afflictions are light as compared with the agony which these high siftings of the soul bring the believing Christian. Job speaks of them in the 30th chapter, saying: "I cry unto thee, and thou dost not hear me: I stand up, and thou regardest me not. Thou art become cruel to me: with thy strong hand thou opposest thyself against me."

Now if God sees fit to permit our faith to be proved in such fiery trials we may learn from this woman what to do. According to the Word which she had heard of Him she firmly believed that Jesus was a merciful helper, and to this Word she steadfastly held, though He acted and spoke like a hard man, yea even called her a dog as though He greatly despised her.

"This," says Luther, "Is written for our comfort that we should learn to know, that God often secretes His grace from us, and that we are not to judge of Him by our feeling and thinking, but straight according to His Word. For here you behold, though Christ pretends to be unwilling, yet there is here not an absolute denial. All His answers sound like no,

but they are not no, they hang in the balance. He does not say: I will not hear her, but is silent, saying neither yes nor no. Neither does He say that she is not of the house of Israel, but that He is sent alone to the house of Israel, leaving His answer in the balance between no and yes. Neither does He say: Thou art a dog and shalt have nothing of the children's bread, but: it is not meet etc., leaving it undecided, whether she be a dog or not. Yet all three sound more like no than yes, and nevertheless it is more yes than no. Indeed it is all yes, but secret and hidden, and it seems all no.

Here the condition of our heart in the time of temptation is pictured to us. As the heart feels, so Christ here behaves. The heart thinks, it is all no, and yet it is not so. Therefore the heart must turn away from its own feeling, and with firm faith must lay hold on the Yes which is hidden deeply under the No, and must hold it according to God's Word, as this woman did." So Martin Luther, a man of large experience in many spiritual temptations. See his sermon on this text.

Let appearances be as they may, let our feelings be ever so bad, we should hold and believe of God, not according to appearances, not according to our feelings, but purely according to His Word. What the Word says of God that He is and does, and though our experiences would seem to contradict it, His Word nevertheless remains true. Appearances may deceive, our feelings may mislead, but the Word of the Lord can neither lie nor deceive. The Word tells us that God is love, and whosoever shall call upon His name shall be saved. If now it appears as though God were turned against us and hated us, we should hold by the Word that He is love, and if our heart would persuade us that God is cruel and has cast us away, yet we should believe the Word more than our own heart. Abiding by the Word we should always be ready to say:

I hold the Word my Savior taught
And trust it, whether felt or not. Amen.

III. SUNDAY IN LENT.

TEXT: And he was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake; and the people wondered. But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub, the chief of the devils. And others, tempting him, sought of him a sign from heaven. But he, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself, is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub. And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? therefore shall they be your judges. But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you. When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils. He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth. When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked. But he said, Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it. Luke 11, 14-28.

“Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” Matt. 7, 13. Two gates by which men enter; two ways in which men walk; and two places to which men go. Every man is walking either in the broad way, which is the way of the world, or in the narrow way, which is the way of Christ; and at the end of the way every man will find himself either in the place of torments, or in the place of pleasures for evermore;

and to whichever place man goes, there shall he be and shall depart from it no more. Neither are these two ways to eternity so nigh together, or so kindred to each other, that a man could walk in them both at the same time; for the one leads upwards and the other downwards, and no man can go both ways at the same time. A man may leave the one way and go to the other, but at one and the same time he can walk only in one way. Judas Iscariot first left the broad way and went to the narrow, when he forsook all and followed Christ; thereafter he again left the narrow and went back to the broad way, and his last estate was worse than his first; for when he had returned again to the broad way he rushed on headlong to destruction. Peter left the broad and went to the narrow way; then he left the narrow and went back to the broad; for when he was denying Christ in the palace-yard of the high priest he was surely not on the narrow, but on the broad way, because those on the narrow way do not deny Christ. Yet Peter again returned to the narrow way and was saved.

Now as there are only two ways in which men may walk, and only two places to which the souls of men go, so there are only two spiritual kingdoms in this world: the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan. Between these two kingdoms the race of man is divided; a third there is not. Hence the most important question for us is not whether we are rich or poor, beloved of men or hated, honored by the world or despised by men, healthy or sick; the most important question for every one of us is, whether we are subjects in Satan's kingdom of sin and death, or whether we have been translated into Christ's kingdom of truth and life. On this question hangs soul and salvation, life and death. Let me to-day speak of:

THE IMPORTANT TRUTH THAT EVERY MAN IS EITHER A CITIZEN OF CHRIST'S OR A SUBJECT OF SATAN'S KINGDOM, showing

- I. The certainty of this truth;
- II. By what marks we may know where we belong; and
- III. What we must do to be and to abide in Christ's kingdom.

I.

The fact that there are only two spiritual kingdoms is proved by this whole Gospel, especially the latter part of it, and most clearly does the Lord express it in the words: "*He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.*" There are two positions only which men can occupy; the one for Christ, the other against Christ. A third is not possible. There are only two kinds of works which men can do: the one is gathering with Christ, the other is scattering with Satan. These are the two kingdoms: the kingdom of Christ, and those in the kingdom of Christ gather with Him, and the kingdom of Satan, and those in that kingdom scatter. The Scriptures do speak of the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness, the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of the world; but you know these are only other names for the kingdom of Christ and that of Satan.

These two kingdoms are against one another, as light is against darkness and darkness against light. These two can not exist together peaceably; for light dispels darkness, and darkness is the enemy of light. That light and darkness should agree and dwell together harmoniously is out of the question. Jesus Christ did not come into the world to establish a kingdom aside from that of Satan, so that they would peaceably rule each in his domain, like the kings of Holland and Belgium are at peace with each other, each ruling in his own kingdom; but Christ came to conquer Satan's kingdom, to destroy it and on its ruins to establish His kingdom. There is no agreement between Christ and Belial to the effect that they would rule together peaceably over the same territory, or that each should rule in his own territory; between Christ and Belial there can be no peace, but only the most determined warfare, war to the knife. There can be no agreement between Christ and Satan that each should have a part of man's heart to rule over. When Christ moves into the heart Satan must go out, and if Belial rules in a heart Christ is not there. "*When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking*

rest: and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in and dwell there." When Christ moves into a heart, the evil spirit must move out and may walk where he can; but where Christ rules he can not remain, as Paul writes: "God hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." Col. 1, 13. If thereafter the evil spirit finds a house from which he had been cast out ready to receive him again, then Christ does not remain there, but such a man has fallen out of the kingdom of Christ back again into the kingdom of Satan, and he is no more Christ's; for the Lord says: "*The last state of that man is worse than the first.*" No one can hold citizenship in both kingdoms, neither can the heart of any man be divided between them half and half.

But this is frequently the case that people are mistaken, or deceive themselves as to the kingdom into which they belong. Sometimes such as truly are in the kingdom of Christ may imagine themselves cast out of the kingdom and forsaken of God. These are true Christians who sink so deeply into spiritual temptation that they can see no more any comfort, and think themselves forsaken and rejected of God, when in fact they have in no way cast away faith and their innermost soul is crying unto God. So David confesses of himself in the 31st Psalm: "I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes: nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee." At a time when he was greatly downcast and could find no comfort David imagined that he was cut off from God and His kingdom, and yet at the same time his soul was crying unto God, and the Lord was inclining a gracious ear unto his cries. If a Christian seeks light and comfort and for a time can find none, and it appears to him that he must be cut off from the kingdom of God he should never give way to such thoughts. Just this is Satan's object to bring him to despair, and so to win him for his kingdom of despair. In this temptation a Christian should keep on asking, seeking, knocking, be-

coming the longer the more instant, and in due time light and comfort will come to him again.

But unnumbered is the multitude of those who imagine themselves in the kingdom of Christ, or claim citizenship in it, whilst, in fact, Satan has them very securely in his kingdom. For this there are numerous examples in the Scriptures. Saul, thereafter called Paul, thought he was doing God high service when he persecuted the disciples, whilst the devil had blindfolded him through prejudices and false doctrines, as he himself confesses: "I did it ignorantly in unbelief." 1 Tim. 1, 13. That Pharisee in the temple imagined himself one of the first in the kingdom of heaven, but Christ says of him that he did not go down to his house justified. This is one of Satan's most cunning and most successful devices that he persuades people on deceptive grounds to imagine themselves the children of God, to think themselves on the way to heaven, when it is by no means so, and when he has so persuaded them, he has them doubly secure in his kingdom. Some he blindfolds with the delusion that they must be the favorites of God, because they are successful in their undertakings and enjoy worldly prosperity; others he persuades to think, they ought to find favor with God, because they live an externally moral life. Some he makes believe they were surely converted and had become heirs to the kingdom of heaven, because they experienced a change of feeling, a sensation of sweetness, when in fact their imaginary conversion was nothing but momentary emotion or the delusion of nervous excitement; others he persuades they must be the children of God because they go to church regularly and give for its support liberally, although in their every-day life they continue to do things which they know to be wrong. In short, Satan is a master in deluding people to imagine themselves in the kingdom of Christ when they are not, and by this artifice he greatly increases and mightily strengthens his kingdom.

Vast is the kingdom of Satan, because into it belongs all that is born flesh of the flesh. In clear and strong words does St. Paul write: "You hath he quickened, who were dead in

trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." Eph. 2, 1. In consequence of Adam's sin man is born into this world with a corrupt nature, and hence he belongs into the kingdom of evil in which Satan is prince and ruler. He is therefore rightly called "the prince of this world," because into his kingdom belong all who are not born again and implanted into Christ.

Hearing this sympathetic people of a so-called wide and liberal heart will exclaim: "What! should all the world belong into Satan's kingdom, except only those in Christ? Are there not many millions of good men and virtuous women who do not believe in Christ, and should they all belong into Satan's kingdom? And there are the innocent little infants! Would you relegate them to the kingdom of darkness only because they were born flesh of the flesh which they could not help?"—Sympathy is good and is always to be commended in its proper sphere, but our sympathetic ideas can never alter facts. We may sympathetically say: Why should that poor little infant be born black simply because its parents are black, which it could not help? We may sympathize with that infant, but our sympathy will not change the color of its skin. All talk of morality, virtue, innocence, not being able to help it, and the like, amounts to nothing. The fact remains,—a sad fact indeed, but none the less a fact—by seducing the first man and woman Satan added the human race to his dominion. The whole race as it is descended from Adam belongs into his kingdom, and though you complain ever so bitterly about it that neither you nor your infant could help its being born with an evil nature, that will not alter the fact. Let your sympathy prevail on you, early to bring your infant to baptism that it may be delivered out of Satan's kingdom and may be implanted into Christ, then your sympathy with it will amount to something. It is better in all simplicity to use the means of deliverance out of Satan's kingdom, than to follow after philosophy falsely so called; for by it

Satan has led many from darkness to darkness, while they numbered themselves among the wise and the enlightened of the earth, or even imagined themselves the children of God.

To walk truly wise we must be careful not to be deceived by the devil's cunning, and we must be diligent to examine if we be truly in Christ's kingdom, unto which Paul so faithfully admonishes: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves." 2 Cor. 13, 5. Hence let me

II.

set forth: By what we may know whether we are in the kingdom of Christ, or not.

In judging of ourselves in this matter we must keep in mind that the devil deludes people to imagine themselves in Christ's kingdom on false grounds, by deceptive arguments, which are not established in the Word of God. Therefore that we be not deceived by him, we must see that we remain on solid ground which can in no way be deceptive. That by which we judge ourselves, whether we are in the kingdom of Christ, must be an infallibly certain criterion so that it cannot deceive. Let me briefly mention three such marks, these being indicated in our text.

The first mark we find in these words of the Lord: "*He that is not with me is against me.*" To be in Christ's kingdom we must be with Christ. What is it to be with Christ? It is to be with Him and for Him in heart, soul, mind and all our powers. We are with Christ, if He is the crown of our heart, the love of our soul, the most precious prize of our highest affections. We are with Christ if He is to us the dearest, the sweetest, the most precious which we know and have. We Christians are to love and we do love many persons and things, but among them all Christ must be to us like a diamond among copper cents; for He has said: "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me." Matt. 18, 37. We are with Christ if He is so dear to our hearts that we are willing, if need be, to forsake all and to follow Him, and

we must be so minded from heart and soul. We must not be like unto that rich young man who declared himself ready to follow Christ, but when he was placed before the alternative to choose between his possessions and Christ, he went away sorrowful, because his heart was more with his possessions than with Christ. Neither must we be like unto those chief rulers of the Jews who believed on Christ, who were convinced that He was the promised One, but who would not confess Him before men from fear of the Pharisees; for they could have no part in the kingdom of Christ, because "they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." John 12, 43. We must be like that "merchant-man, seeking goodly pearls; who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it." Matt. 13, 46. We are with Christ if He is to us that one pearl of great price for which we are ready to sell all else. We are with Christ, if our heart is so decided for Him that we would rather cut off our right hand and pluck out our right eye and cast it from us, than to forsake or deny Him. If we are so for Christ, we know that Christ, and not Satan, is ruling in our heart.

The second mark by which we may know to which kingdom we belong is found in the words: "*And he that gathereth not with me scattereth.*" He that does truly Christian works, gathers with Christ; but he that does un-Christian works, whether the world counts them good or evil, scatters. But outwardly the works of the Christian and those of the hypocrite are alike. Therefore we must here look for the governing principle from which our actions flow. "The flesh," says St. Paul, "lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law." Gal. 5, 17. The flesh, a part of the kingdom of Satan, is yet in the Christian and is striving against the kingdom of Christ, but where Christ's kingdom is there it is victorious over the kingdom of Satan. We are not to imagine that we must be altogether without sin in order to be in the kingdom of Christ; because of the flesh the Chris-

tian daily commits much sin; but we must look and see, if the flesh rules in us so that, led by the lusts of the flesh, we walk in the works of the flesh; for if we willingly walk in sin, then we are in the kingdom of Satan; but if we are led by the Spirit of Christ which resists, breaks and hinders in us the will of the flesh, then is the kingdom of God come unto us. If the Spirit of Christ is the ruling principle from which our works flow, then we are gathering with Christ, and if gathering with Him we are surely in His kingdom.

The third mark by which we may know where we belong is contained in the last two verses of our text, reading: "*And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked. But he said, Yea, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.*" This woman pronounced the mother of Jesus blessed, because she had given birth to Him, and had nursed Him. In this the virgin Mary was certainly favored of God above all women, but she was not saved by it. Not because she gave birth to the Son of God was Mary saved, but because she heard His Word and kept it, as we read of her: "His mother kept all these sayings in her heart." Luke 2, 51. Mary kept the Word of Jesus, she believed on Him, embraced Him not only as her son, but as her Savior; through faith she appropriated His righteousness and thereby she was saved. Jesus' blood and righteousness are the foundation on which our heart's faith must stand according to His Word; for His merit alone saves. If, therefore, our trust stands on our works, our integrity, our experiences, our sensations, or whatever other such uncertain things there may be, then let our trust be ever so sincere and ever so strong, we cannot be saved thereby. Though Christ would appear unto us bodily, though we would see Him with our eyes and touch Him with our hands as the disciples and Judas Iscariot also did, and we would put our trust for salvation in such sensible seeing and feeling Him we would, nevertheless, not be in the kingdom of Christ; for all the plea of those

truly in His kingdom is that Jesus' blood washes them from sin and His righteousness covers their unrighteousness. They say:

Christ's crimson blood and righteousness
My glory are and spotless dress;
In this before my God I'll stand
And enter heaven, my fatherland.

This is the foundation of all those in Christ's kingdom, and if this is our heart's trust we know that we are in His kingdom, and if in His kingdom we are joint heirs with Him.

But where else is the blood and righteousness of Christ exhibited unto us than in His Word? Therefore the Lord corrects this woman saying: "*Yea, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.*" In the Word we are to seek, find and hold fast the righteousness of Christ. This brings us to the last part of our discourse, on which allow me a few sentences only.

III.

Our Lord Jesus Christ came to deliver the souls of men from the kingdom of the devil, and in token of this He cast out devils, delivering those from the power of Satan who were bodily possessed of evil spirits, as we read in the beginning of this Gospel: "*And he was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake; and the people wondered.*" Justly did the people wonder at this deed of the Lord; for to cast out devils bodily is a divine work. But Christ is come for something greater: to deliver our souls from the power of Satan. His casting out devils bodily is to teach us that He is come for the deliverance of our souls, which He purchased from the power of Satan by suffering and death. And when Christ had overcome that strong man armed, He left on earth the power to deliver the souls of men from Satan's kingdom through the Word and the Sacraments. Through the means of grace He still casts out devils out of the hearts of men. If I preach the Word of the Gospel to a sinner and he receives it in faith Satan is driven from his heart and soul, of course not by me as a man, or by my power which

I have of myself, but by the power of the Word. Every child born on earth is born into the kingdom of the devil, but suffer it to come to Jesus and to be baptized into His death, and it is delivered from the kingdom of Satan. If your sins trouble you, if the hand of faith with which you hold the righteousness of Christ trembles, hear His Word, have absolution pronounced to you, receive the Lord's Supper, that thus you may be confirmed and strengthened in the faith that Jesus Christ is truly your King, the Lord of your salvation. The means of grace we must use as weapons with which to resist Satan and his angels, until it pleases the Lord to translate us out of strife into the enjoyment of the inheritance of the saints in light, through Jesus Christ who is the Captain of our salvation. Amen.

IV. SUNDAY IN LENT.

TEXT: After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias. And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased. And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples. And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh. When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Phillip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? (And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.) Philip answered him, Two hundred penny-worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, There is a lad here, which hath five barley-loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many? And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. (Now there was much grass in the place.) So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes, as much as they would. When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain that nothing be lost. Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley-loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten. Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world. When Jesus therefore perceived that they would take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone. John 6, 1-15.

Our present Gospel, simple as it appears, is nevertheless one of the most important, because it contains so strong an inducement unto faith and trust toward God. Though the word faith does not occur in it, yet it is nothing else than faith and confidence in the goodness and mercy of God which the Lord intends to teach by this miracle. We have here a truly striking illustration of that truth which the Lord expresses in plain words, saying: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Matt. 6, 33. This is to be our faith, this our trust, if we seek the things which are above, the necessities of this temporal life will not

be denied us. But with many cheerful dependence on the goodness and faithfulness of God is small indeed. Even with true children of God it is something very frequent that they will count, not so much on that which God gives, as rather on that which they calculate to make by their own industry, wisdom and skill. Every Christian knows that all is dependent on God's blessing, yet when Christian parents meditate on their own and their family's support, they are very apt to think first of their own ability, and secondly of God's blessing. But this way of thinking is surely not a fruit of faith, it manifests the self-dependence which is in the flesh.

We are indeed fallen creatures. The Word of God tells us that the visible things are perishable, and only the invisible are abiding. Yet we will ten times sooner put our trust in that which we see, than in that which we do not see. So it is with the righteousness of works and the righteousness of faith. The righteousness of works we see and the righteousness of faith we can not see, but who can step forth and say that his heart is not far more inclined to exclaim: Behold, how many and how excellent are my works of piety and my deeds of charity! than to say: Behold, how many and great are the deeds of the Son of God, my Righteousness. We know, before God the righteousness of faith alone is acceptable, whilst the righteousness of works is before Him as filthy rags; yet the perverse heart will look to the righteousness of works rather than to the righteousness of faith.

Similar with food and raiment. So long as we see the barrel of meal and the cruise of oil full it is easy for us to avoid fretting about the morrow; but when these vessels threaten to give out, then anxious cares soon begin to knock at our door. When the harvest is promising we are confident concerning our daily bread; but when it threatens to be a failure, then we are quickly at hand with the questions: "What shall we eat? What shall we drink? Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" Matt. 6, 31. When we are surrounded with plenty confidence is great, but when the abundance threatens to become indigence, then the heart begins to flutter. Now when we experience that in plenty

our heart is confident, in scarcity despondent, we should know thereby that there is something in our hearts which is not as it ought to be. And if we search for that something, we soon find it indicated in the Lord's words: "Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed." John 20, 29. The abundance which we have is so apt to be a stay for our confidence, when in reality, we ought to rest assured of receiving daily bread just as cheerfully when we see nothing, as when we see plenty. This is the faith and trust which this Gospel teaches. Accordingly let me speak of

THE MIRACULOUS FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND,
setting forth

- I. Some things which preceded the miracle;
- II. The miracle itself and what followed it.

I.

How extremely difficult it is for man without seeing yet to believe, is here illustrated in the disciples. But to see this clearly it is necessary to know what preceded the transaction narrated here.

Jesus had sent the disciples two by two to preach the Gospel throughout Judea and Galilee, and had given them power over the unclean spirits, commanding them, they should take nothing for their journey, no scrip, no bread, no money in their purses, but should be shod with sandals, and should not put on two coats. So the disciples had gone forth supplied with nothing, had preached the Gospel and performed miracles, and then they gathered around their Master again on the shore of the sea of Tiberias, and to the Lord's question: "Lacked ye anything?" they answered: "Nothing." Luke 22, 35. They had been provided with nothing, yet confessed that they had lacked nothing. When the disciples were again with Jesus the people flocked to them in such multitudes that not even time to eat was left to Jesus and the disciples. Therefore the Lord said to the disciples: "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while." Mark 6, 31. To find a little rest they entered a ship

and steered for an uninhabited region where only grass grew. But the people saw them depart and knowing where they were going followed them. And so eager were the people to follow Jesus that they started forthwith without first providing themselves with victuals.

Whence this eagerness? By the Scribes and Pharisees those people had been taught that the time for the Messiah to come was at hand, and when He would come He would liberate His people from the yoke of the Romans and would establish a worldly empire at Jerusalem. Believing that the Messiah would be a worldly benefactor and convinced by His miracles they began to think that Jesus of Nazareth was truly the Messiah, and hence they were eager to see more of His deeds, and to do Him homage. Many perhaps cherished the hope that His first and most zealous adherents would obtain the first honors in His kingdom. Therefore it is said of them in the text that they "*followed him because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased,*" and when they had eaten of the five barley loaves and were satisfied they exclaimed: "*This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world,*" and they proposed to "*take him by force, to make him a king.*" They followed Him eagerly, but from a wrong motive. Doubtless there were some among them who hungered and thirsted after righteousness, but the majority hoped for worldly gain. Therefore there was no perseverance in them, but the very next day when Jesus preached: "I am the bread of life," they took exception and walked no more with Him. But the more those people were in error, the more was the Lord moved with compassion toward them.

"*When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him.*" He is that Keeper of Israel whose eyelids are not heavy with slumber, of whom David sang in the 33d Psalm: "The eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy; to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine." He has a sharp and watchful eye. Beholding that company He at once knew that they had brought no bread with them, and that He must provide for them.

He sees the desolate field and the empty pantry and the purse without scrip, and though He may suffer poverty to come on His children, yet does He watch over them to keep them alive in famine. Look unto Him in the day of thy need; for He is both rich and merciful.

At the same time the Lord's eye detected an evil trait in the hearts of His disciples, and moved by the same compassion He set about to heal it. Therefore He "*saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?*" He intimated to the disciples that it was their duty to give those people a meal, because they had traveled so far to come to them in the wilderness and had remained with them until now; and now the night was drawing on and it would not be right to send them away hungry. Therefore He inquired of Philip, where to buy bread for the people. This question might well startle Philip; for there were present five thousand men, women and children not counted. To feed such a multitude was not a small matter, especially as they had eaten nothing during the day. Philip's predicament is shown by his answer: "*Two hundred penny-worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.*" The amount which Philip named makes about thirty dollars, and that would certainly not have been sufficient to provide a meal for five thousand men. Likely it was all they had, and Philip meant to say, though they would spend all their money, it would be of no avail. Philip's answer shows that he saw no other way than to let the people go away hungry, that he was at a loss where to look for help in this emergency, and just this was what the Lord wanted to teach him, where to look for help in such needs; for it is explicitly stated: "*This he said to prove him.*"

Why did the Lord want to prove or try Philip and in him all the disciples? Was it to find out where Philip's trust stood, or how strong his faith was? Or did He mean to lay a stumbling block into Philip's way, to lead him into anxiety and doubt? Nay, surely not! Neither the one nor the other. The Lord knew beforehand what Philip's faith was and what its ailings were; for rightly did Peter, when the Lord asked him: "Simon,

son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" answer: "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." John 21, 17. Much less did the Lord prove Philip to cause him to fall into doubt; for no evil can proceed from the Lord, as St. James 1, 13, writes: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." God is not a tempter unto evil, but He is a tempter unto good. As a father examines his children in the things which they have learned, not because he is ignorant as to how much they know, nor to bewilder them, but to establish them in what they already know and to advance them in knowledge: so the Father in heaven frequently proves His children in their faith, hope and love to establish them therein and to teach them what their ailings are and wherein they are yet lacking. Therefore the Lord says unto the bishop of Laodicea: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." Rev. 3, 19. To His beloved children God sends tribulations, crosses and afflictions, not as though He took pleasure in plaguing them, much less to drive them from Him, but to establish and advance them that they may grow in faith, hope and love. So the Lord proved the disciples, making it very plain to them that they had neither food nor the means to obtain it; and yet they had a multitude of guests who were hungry and must have some nourishment. And it quickly became manifest, how exceedingly weak and little established the faith of the disciples was, because they saw no other way than to send the people away hungry. They had so often seen the Lord do marvelous things; they themselves in His name and power had performed miracles, and but recently on their journey they had experienced that they lacked nothing, though they were provided with nothing. Yet none of them stepped forward to say: Lord, why askest Thou advice from us? If Thou wilt Thou canst turn these rocks into bread, or bring down manna from heaven. Nay, but they fell into extreme anxiety. And why? Why because their eyes beheld no food, but only a desolate waste.

Now the Lord likely sent the disciples to make inquiry, if any food could be found with the multitude, and there were

found "five barley loaves,"—one loaf for every thousand—"and two small fishes." Of the size of the loaves we may judge by the fact that they were carried by a lad. That, of course, could not comfort the disciples, it only served to make the lack of food so much more apparent. "What," says Andrew, "*what are they among so many?*" The provision is small, the family is large; the pennies are few, the mouths to be filled are many. How shall ends meet?

A speech proceeding from common sense calculation, but not from faith in the omnipotence of the Lord. This was what the Lord wanted to bring home to the minds of the disciples that their trust stood too much on what they could see with their eyes and handle with their hands. This fault He wanted to set before them in order that, seeing the miracle which followed, they might be ashamed of their littleness of faith. And by setting the present need before them so clearly He intended to prepare their minds so that the miracle which He was about to do would make a deeper and more lasting impression upon them; for the more deeply we feel the need in which we are, the more are we capable of appreciating the deliverance.

II.

When the Lord had so prepared the minds of the disciples, He commanded the multitude to be seated on the grass, and then He took the five barley loaves with His hands, those hands into which the Father has laid "all power in heaven and in earth;" those hands of which the Psalmist says: "Thou openest thy hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." When He had taken the loaves He looked up to heaven whence all good gifts come. Neither did He forget the table-prayer, but gave thanks, blessing the bread and fishes, and thereby creating in them the quality to multiply. Then He began to distribute, and He distributed, not *as much as there was* but "*as much as they would.*" Whether the bread multiplied in the hands of Jesus alone, or also in the hands of the disciples we are not told, but those five thousand men together with the women and children ate and were satiated, and when they gathered up the frag-

ments, there were twelve baskets full, a much larger quantity than the original five loaves had been.

By this miracle the Lord proved Himself the almighty God who alone can multiply or diminish His creatures, and He teaches by it that He will give daily bread to those seeking His kingdom. On this we should depend without doubts and without scruples. Instead of inquiring anxiously: "What shall we eat?" we should trust the faithfulness and power of Him who with five loaves satiated five thousand. Yea, what He did there in the wilderness, multiply bread which was already baked, is no greater miracle than that which He annually does, making the earth bring forth food for men and beasts on the whole face of the globe. This miracle we see every year, therefore we do not regard it. But the royal singer David took note of it, and he sang: "Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it; thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: thou settlest the furrows thereof: thou makest it soft with showers: thou blessest the springing thereof. Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness." Ps. 65, 9. God has promised to give food to all flesh, and He keeps promise long as the world stands, and it is surely a marvelous thing, if we did but consider it. Men, beasts, birds, fishes, insects, everything that lives and moves on earth, daily finds its nourishment. How is it possible that since thousands of years the earth produces enough for so many myriads of creatures? But when God adds His divine blessing it suffices and an abundance is left over, as when the prophet Elisha set twenty barley cakes before a hundred men. God is a host who, if He chooses, can satiate many with a morsel. On the other hand, if God takes away the nutritive qualities of bread, then a great quantity is not sufficient for a few. People may eat, but are not strengthened. God is the Lord of bread. If it is His will one loaf will nourish an hundred men, and if it is not His will an hundred loaves cannot nourish one man. God is almighty; He can do whatsoever He pleases. Why then do we act so foolishly as to put

our confidence in the abundance we have in store rather than in Him who gave it, who alone can preserve it and who can also take it away? It is written: "Man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord, doth man live." Deut. 8, 3.

Now God gives daily bread to all men, also to the wicked; nevertheless God makes a difference between the unbelieving and the believers, and this we should well consider. God does give daily bread to the wicked, frequently in great abundance, but to them He has nowhere promised that they should not starve to death. He rather threatens them hunger, starvation and all manner of plagues, as we find many such threats in the book of Deuteronomy. If an unbeliever perishes by hunger that is nothing strange. But the Christian who seeks the kingdom of God and relies upon it that God will give him daily bread has the promise that "these things," not riches, but "bread and fishes," the necessities of life, "shall be added unto him." That man will not perish from hunger who in unwavering faith holds God by His promise; for God will not be made a liar. Rightly does Luther say on this text: "God will give us enough to eat even though one fish must become ten thousand and one loaf an hundred thousand. Therefore, in poverty we should be untterrified and await His compassion. If any one starves to death his unbelief is the fault; but sooner must the whole world perish in hunger, than that a man who believes should die of starvation." Luther does of course not mean to say that under extraordinary conditions the Christian must not also suffer starvation with others. When Jerusalem was besieged by the Chaldeans the prophet Jeremiah felt the pangs of hunger as well as others. But the promises of God cannot be broken, and it is not possible that he should ever be forsaken of God who adheres to His promises.

Trust in the goodness of God requires also that we honor His gifts, and do not destroy them. "*When they were filled he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.*" The promise is to the industrious and the saving, not to the idle and wasteful. In every gift of God there

is a blessing. If you waste the gift you waste the blessing, and the curse will cling to you and will spoil all your goods. When God gives abundantly do not waste it in rioting and drunkenness, or the day will come when you will be as poor as that rich man in the place of torments. Honor the penny and God will count you worthy the dollar. The disciples went to gather up the fragments and each brought his basket full. There is many a poor Lazarus who does not know whence the year's support is to come, but he walks in the fear of the Lord, is content with his portion of bread and fishes, and day by day God grants him to eat the labor of his hands and at the end of the year he has a little basket full left over. "A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked. For the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the Lord upholdeth the righteous." Ps. 37, 16. Gather up the fragments, and though you need them not for yourself save them for the church and the poor. They will bring you compound interest.

Yet we must not follow Christ for the hope of reaping earthly benefits; for then we would be doing the same which that multitude did. They thought, with such a man they could always enjoy plenty, and therefore they sought to make Him a king. If we would be Christ's, only because it is He that gives daily bread, we would be giving Him the smaller honor and denying Him the greater. Though He has a care for our bodies, yet that was not the purpose for which He came into the world. He came down from heaven to be that bread which nourishes the soul unto eternal life. As the bread of life we must seek Him that our souls may not starve eternally. If we seek Christ as that bread which, if a soul eat thereof, it can never die, then only are we truly seeking "the kingdom of God and his righteousness," and then only does the promise apply to us that temporal necessities shall be added unto us. Lord! evermore grant us that bread which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Amen.

V. SUNDAY IN LENT.

FIRST SERMON.

TEXT: Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? He that is of God, heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God. Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil? Jesus answered, I have not a devil; but I honour my Father, and ye do dishonour me. And I seek not mine own glory: there is one that seeketh and judgeth. Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death. John 8, 46-51.

Jesus Christ "was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." Rom. 4, 25. These two facts, the Lord's death and resurrection, are the chief pillars on which our Christian faith rests. If Christ had not died our sins would not be atoned for and there could be no forgiveness of sin; and if He had not risen again there would be no righteousness for us in which we could stand before God and no resurrection unto eternal glory. But the Son of God did die, as He had prophesied by David in the 22d Psalm, complaining: "My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death." For what purpose the Lord of glory suffered the pangs of death in all their bitterness, He foretold by Hosea, the prophet, in the 13th chapter, saying: "O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction." He died in order to be the death of death, the destruction of the power of the grave, as the prophet said of Him: "He will swallow up death in victory." Is. 25, 8. And that He through His death did truly destroy the power of death St. Paul testifies, writing: "He hath abolished death, and brough life and immortality to light." 2 Tim. 1, 10.

For whom did He bring life and immortality to light? Was it for Himself? Did He stand in need of it? He needed it not.

He had life and immortality in Himself from eternity. For Himself He needed not to overcome death; He was the Lord of death. For whom He obtained victory over death He tells by the prophet, saying: "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death." Hos. 13, 14. Who these "them" are whom the Lord through death ransomed from the power of death the Psalmist tells us, addressing the Lord in these words: "Thou hast ascended on high; thou hast led captivity captive; Thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." Ps. 68, 18. Men, not the pious only, but the rebellious also, He through death ransomed from the power of death. This was the purpose for which He died that He might divide gifts unto men, among which gifts this is the greatest and most precious that men in death might triumph over death. Therefore He through death destroyed the power of death that unto us mortal sinners this gift be given that in the very face of death we might triumphantly say: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. 15, 55.

How then are we made partakers of His victory over death? When do we possess this gift to overcome death, and by what may we in death triumph over death? The Lord tells us in this Gospel when He says: "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.*" From these words let me set forth:

THE KEEPING OF CHRIST'S SAYING OUR VICTORY OVER DEATH.

Three things must here come into consideration:

- I. What saying we must keep;
- II. What it is to keep Christ's saying;
- III. How death is overcome by the Christian.

I.

When it was said of Christ by the prophet that He would "swallow up death in victory," the meaning was not that He

would put away death, destroying it utterly, or that He would not die; but the meaning was that in and through death He would destroy the power of death. Likewise, when the Lord here says: "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death,*" the meaning is not that such an one would not die bodily, or that he would be received into heaven without bodily death, like Enoch and Elias, but that in death he would not see death and destruction, but only life and salvation; for that man truly passes through death as a victor over death who sees in death not a destroyer, but only a janitor into true life. What must a man do in order to pass through death as a victor over death? The Lord says: "*If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.*" To overcome death we must keep a saying. What saying? "*My saying,*" says the Lord. He distinguishes His saying from all other sayings, His Word from all other words, and this we must be careful to remember. We must distinguish Christ's saying from all other sayings, for *only to His saying* does He ascribe this great thing that, if a man keep it, he shall never see death.

Now Christ's saying is not Moses' saying, but His saying is the very contrary of Moses' saying. Both Christ's and Moses' sayings are contained in the Bible, and both these sayings are of God, but the Scripture distinguishes them sharply. Thus John writes in chapter 1st of his Gospel: "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ;" and Paul writes Gal. 4, 4: "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Christ's saying is an altogether different saying than that of Moses. Moses says: This do, and if thou do it thou shalt live and shalt be blessed, but if thou do it not thou shalt die and shalt be damned; but Christ's saying runs in this wise: ye shall be free from the curse and shall live, notwithstanding that ye have sinned. By Moses' saying we can therefore not overcome death. Moses' saying can only multiply unto us the horrors of death. Even though a man had kept the whole law, and had failed in one point only, yet Moses delivers him into the power of death as

the wages of his sin. All those who think they must be able to meet death cheerfully, because they have walked in the law given by Moses and have lived innocently and piously, will find themselves sadly mistaken; for when death comes, then the law proves itself "the strength of sin," 1 Cor. 15, 56, accusing man of sin and convincing him that his doom is sealed, because he must now appear before a holy God, before whom only those can stand who possess perfect and spotless holiness. Because of sin Moses' saying consigns us to the power of death and can only serve to increase the bitterness of death, and if in death we would triumph over death we must accustom ourselves not to look to the saying of Moses, with its conditional promises and its curses, but must turn to the saying of Jesus Christ.

Therefore we must also remember that when the Lord here says "*My saying*," He does not mean all sayings, or every word which He uttered when on earth. On a mount He once preached a long and powerful sermon, recorded by Matthew in the 5th, 6th and 7th chapters, but in that sermon He spoke as in the person of Moses, exercising the office of Moses and expounding the law, and so on many occasions he proclaimed and explained the law. These explanations of the law, though spoken with His own lips, are not properly His saying; not that saying which He here means, not that saying by which we may overcome death. By Him grace came; therefore that alone is properly His saying which tells of grace for sinners, that He is the propitiation for our sins, that by His death He won for us eternal life, that His resurrection is our justification. The Word of grace and reconciliation, the Gospel, that is properly His saying of which He is here speaking.

If from the saying of Moses, which is also God's inspired Word, much more must we distinguish Christ's saying from the sayings of men. When the pope commands fastings and pilgrimages, when he directs the dying to be anointed with oil, a crucifix to be laid on their bosom, and the like; when Moralists say to do right is the way to heaven; when some Revivalists teach people to rely on a sensation of sweetness: those are all vain things which, when death comes, afford no foundation,

but melt away before the terrors of the grave like snow in the heat of the noon-day sun. So it is with all human doctrines, all teachings not in agreement with the saying of Christ, as Paul writes: "Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build on this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is." 1 Cor. 3, 11. Every man's doctrine is tried in the day of affliction as by fire, and it either approves itself in the fire or is burned up. Such a fiery trial of all doctrine is the approach of death. Then will all doctrines which are not established by the saying of Christ, be consumed like stubble in the fire, and will afford no stay and comfort to the heart. "*My saying,*" says the Lord. His saying alone will be a staff in the valley of the shadow of death. Therefore we should not rest satisfied simply to believe what the multitude believes, neither should we blindly follow the lead of any man; but we should prove all things and make sure that the word which we have is truly the Word of Christ; for of it alone He says: "*If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.*"

II.

When we are certain that we have the right and true saying of Christ, how is it kept? What is it to "*keep*" His saying? Here we must again distinguish well, and must bear in mind that the saying of Christ is not and cannot be kept like the saying of Moses. Different sayings must be kept in different ways. If a farmer tells his laborers what to do, they can keep that saying in no other way than by going and doing the work. But if a man tells his family a piece of good news, they can keep that saying in no other way than by accepting it as true, by believing it and rejoicing over it. Moses' saying consists in commands, and can be kept in no other way than by going and doing the works commanded. But Christ's saying is of an altogether different nature. Christ's saying is a message of good news which comes to us from heaven, and which tells us that the Son of God became man and suffered and died in our sins;

that He broke the bonds of death, rose again and ascended up to heaven to intercede for us with the Father and to prepare a place for us; and that, when we come to die, we shall not go into everlasting darkness, but shall come to Christ and shall be with Him in everlasting blessedness. How can we keep this saying? Can we keep it by giving alms to the poor, or by practicing honesty in our dealings? This we are of course to do, but that is doing something which Moses has commanded, and it is not keeping the word: "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin." 1 John 1, 7. This saying we can only keep in the same way as we read of Mary, the mother of Jesus: "But his mother kept all these sayings in her heart." Luke 2, 51. Christ's saying we can keep in no other way than by keeping it in the heart, by resting our faith, trust and confidence in it. There is the word: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." 1 Tim. 1, 15. That word I can keep in no other way than by believing it, by holding it as a faithful saying. There is the word: "Jesus Christ is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." 1 John 2, 2. That word I can keep in no other way than by believing it and rejoicing over it; for it requires nothing of me, it only tells me that Christ is the propitiation for my sins. So it is with the whole Gospel. It can be kept only by receiving it as a word of divine truth, and resting the heart's trust and confidence in it.

How is it that the Lord to so simple a thing as keeping His saying in faith, ascribes this great benefit of never seeing death? It is because Christ will not be separated from His Word. A man may go back on his word, but Christ not. Hold Christ's Word and you have Christ Himself. On this Dr. Luther very appropriately says: "Because the Word proclaims Christ to us, it proclaims unto us Him who overcame death, sin, and the devil. Hence he that grasps and holds it, grasps and holds Christ, and, therefore, obtains through the Word that he is delivered from death forever. Hence it is a Word of life, and

it is certain, whosoever keeps it, shall never see death." Sermon on this text, § 8.

III.

And now, what does the Lord promise to him that keeps His saying? "*He shall never see death.*" And this the Lord affirms with the double affirmation: "*Verily, verily, I say unto you.*" The Lord does not promise that he shall not die, but that he shall not *see* death. On another occasion He did say: "I am the resurrection, and the life, he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die," John 11, 25, but there He was speaking of death in a different manner than here, as His words show: "Though he were dead, yet shall he live," live in me. But here the Lord makes a distinction between *dying* and *seeing* death. He that keeps Christ's saying shall die, but he shall not *see* death. Dying and seeing death is not one and the same thing; there is a great difference between them. It is one thing to die, and quite another thing to *see* death. Death is the separation of soul and body, but seeing death is to see it as death, in all its horridness. To the first we are all subject; we must all die, the Christian as well as the un-Christian; but in the latter, the seeing death, there is no such equality; for he that keeps Christ's saying does not see death in its hideousness. And why not? Especially because of two things. In the first place, he that keeps Christ's saying has in that saying a sure and infallible weapon to ward off those things which make death so awful to man. What are those things? They are: Sin, the curse of the law, and the just judgment of God. These are the things which make death so terrible to sinful man, and against these things the saying of Christ furnishes a sure and effective weapon. If sin would trouble him, he that holds Christ's saying wards it off with the appeal that Christ, the Lamb of God, has taken away his sins. If the law would accuse him, he answers that the Son of God was put under the law to redeem him from the curse of the law. If the judgment of God presents itself, he appeals to the word: "He that believeth on

the Son, is not condemned." John 3, 18. So he that keeps Christ's saying has in that saying a weapon to ward off those things which torment the conscience in death, and which make death so bitter to man.

Another reason, why he that keeps Christ's saying does not see death although he dies is, because by that saying he knows where his soul is journeying to. He that does not keep Christ's saying must, at the very best, die in uncertainty. He has nothing infallible to hold to, no positively reliable guide, and, therefore, does not know where his soul will go, but he is tormented with the evil foreboding that it will not fare well. He that does not keep Christ's saying, that does not believe His promises, may, at the approach of death, say that he *must* go, but he can nevermore sincerely say that he *wants* to go; for only with terror can he think of entering upon so uncertain a journey. One not keeping Christ's saying can nevermore uprightly say, as Paul does: "I have a desire to depart." Phil. 1, 23. But he that keeps Christ's saying knows where his soul is going; for he has the Word of the Lord: "Where I am there shall also my servant be." John 12, 26. He that keeps Christ's saying knows, when the hour of death is come, that now he is going to Jesus, the Beloved of his soul, and he anticipates the journey with joy. So the believer overcomes death. He does not see it in all its hideousness, nor taste its pangs in all their sharpness, but holding the Lord's Word and Promise he regards death the entrance into eternal glory. He is like one standing at a river bank, whose eye, riveted by the beauties of the shore beyond, does not see the rushing current of the waters. That this is the death of the believer the Lord solemnly affirms, saying: "*Verily, verily, I say unto you.*"

Blessed, blessed is every one that keeps the saying of Christ in his heart, so keeps it that it becomes rooted in him and death itself can not uproot it; for verily, "*he shall never see death.*" Amen.

V. SUNDAY IN LENT.

SECOND SERMON.

TEXT; Then said the Jews unto him, Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death. Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makest thou thyself? Jesus answered, If I honour myself, my honour is nothing: it is my Father that honoureth me; of whom ye say, that he is your God: yet ye have not known him; but I know him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know him, and keep his saying. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am. Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by. John 8, 52-59.

Abraham, because of his faith and obedience toward God called "the father of the faithful," obtained the promise that he should be "a father of many nations"; for when he once on a time in sadness of heart complained: "I go childless," the Lord answered him: "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them. So shall thy seed be." Gen. 15, 5. Numberless as the stars of the firmament the seed of Abraham was to become, and not a letter of this promise has fallen to the ground.

But the seed of Abraham is of four kinds. In the first place, the Seed of Abraham is He in whom Abraham himself and all the families of the earth are blessed: Jesus Christ, who, as concerning the flesh, came from the seed of Abraham. This is that Seed in whom all the promises given to Abraham centred, through whom all the children of Abraham were to become the blessed of the Lord; for of him Paul writes, Galatians 3d, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made.

He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." Jesus Christ is *THE Seed* of Abraham, the Source and Author of the blessing.

In the second place, the seed of Abraham are his bodily descendants: the Jews, the Ishmaelites and all those nations that descended from the six sons of Keturah, Abraham's second wife. This bodily seed of Abraham is of two kinds: those who are descendants of Abraham, but have not Abraham's faith, the Arabs and the unbelieving Jews; and those who both are descendants of Abraham and have Abraham's faith, the believers of the Old Testament and all Jews who have been converted to Christ.

Finally, Abraham has a seed as the "father of the faithful." "Know ye therefore," says St. Paul, "that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham." Gal. 3, 7. Christ is *the Seed* of Abraham, and hence all those are the children of Abraham who believe on Christ and through faith are one with Him. These, the community of saints, are, in the sense of the Scriptures, the true seed of Abraham; for so St. Paul writes: "They are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children. They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted for the seed." Rom. 9, 6. Before God those are not the children of Abraham who have not the faith of Abraham, although they be his bodily descendants; but those are the children of Abraham who walk in the faith in which Abraham walked, although they be descendants of Japhet or Ham. Therefore Christ said to the Jews: "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham." John 8, 39. Those only are Abraham's true children who believe on the promised Seed and who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Before God the Jews are no longer the children of Abraham, but a countless multitude of those who are not his bodily descendants, have been adopted the children of Abraham and have come into the inheritance. We of the house of Japhet have become the children of Abraham through faith in the prom-

ised Seed; for those are his children who see the day of Christ as he did. Let me briefly speak of

SEEING THE DAY OF CHRIST.

- I. How Abraham saw it.
- II. How we may attain the same seeing.

I.

This chapter contains one of the many debates which Jesus had with the Pharisees. The great issue between them was this: The Pharisees trusted in their works for righteousness before God, but Jesus taught: "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." John 6, 29. Now the Pharisees brought to Him a woman who had been taken in the act of adultery, and they said: "Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?" They calculated, if Jesus would say, the woman should not be stoned they could accuse Him of speaking against Moses, and if He would say, she should be stoned, they could accuse Him of inconsistency and could ask: How then canst Thou preach forgiveness to publicans and sinners? But Jesus replied: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." He did not say that crime should not be punished by the government, but He accused the Pharisees of hypocrisy; for His reply involved this argument: You condemn this woman for her works, and count yourselves righteous in your works; therefore which one of you knows for a certainty that he is without sin, let him throw the first stone. Crime is to be punished, and we are to live right, but when it comes to the question, how we are justified before God? and we then want to appeal to our works, then we must be found without sin; for if there is the least spot in us, we are under the condemnation of the law just as well as murderers, thieves and adulterers. But the Pharisees could not say that they were without sin, and smitten by their own conscience they slunk away.

If we could live without sin, then we could stand in our own righteousness, but because no one can be without sin, therefore

the only way for us to be saved is by grace, that our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. The word will ever stand: "There is no difference; for all have sinned." Those Pharisees were sinners just as well as that adulteress, although they had not committed so flagrant a transgression as she had. Of this the Lord convicted them by His reply, and when they nevertheless would not yield, but brought up the argument that they were the children of Abraham, the Lord disputed this and said: "*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.*" Abraham saw his salvation in the promised Seed. He was therefore of an altogether different mind than the Pharisees, who thought to see their salvation in their works.

What is the day of Christ, and how did Abraham see it? The day of Christ is the time from His birth to His ascension, the time during which He performed the work of redemption, including the time of the preaching of the Gospel. The prophet Hosea said in his 1st chapter: "Great shall be the day of Jezreel," that is, the day of the promised Seed, and Peter in the 3d chapter of Acts says: "All the prophets from Samuel, and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have foretold of these days." This day of Christ is the day of the preaching of grace and salvation, and this day, the time when the Son of God walked on earth, preached the Gospel and has it preached in all the world, this blessed time Abraham rejoiced to see. The salvation in the promised Seed of woman was what Abraham desired above all things, and when the promise came to him that the Deliverer would come out of his seed his heart was glad. The salvation in this Seed was dearer to him than home, friends and relations; it was more precious to him than good days and earthly prosperity; for having received the promise he cheerfully emigrated from the land of his nativity to become a restless wanderer in strange lands. Yea, when God commanded him to sacrifice his only son Isaac he hesitated not. How precious must the promised salvation have been to Abraham, seeing he was so ready to sacrifice all and to do whatever God required of him.

How could Abraham be so sure and certain of this salvation

as to rejoice over it so greatly? O the Lord says: "*Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it.*" Abraham *saw* the day of Christ. On account of these words some have thought that God showed Abraham in a vision, what Christ would do and suffer on earth, and how He would triumph over sin, death and hell. Such a vision might indeed have been granted him, but the Scriptures say nothing about it, and it is only supposition. Neither do these words imply anything of the kind, that Abraham should have seen the day of Christ in a picture of the mind, or with his bodily eyes. How Abraham saw Christ's day the Scriptures tell us very clearly, even by calling him "the father of the faithful." By faith he saw the salvation of Jezreel, the Seed of God. Speaking of the patriarchs the epistle to the Hebrews 11, 13, says: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them." They saw the promises, that is, the things promised, afar off, and they saw them so that they were persuaded of them and embraced them. Through faith in the Word of promise they saw the things promised for the far future, and they were so positive, so certain of those things as though they were already present before their eyes.

Abraham saw the day of Christ in the promise and in types, especially the offering up of Isaac. Abraham understood, as he offered up his only son, so God would not spare His only begotten Son, but would deliver Him up for the sins of the world. He saw, as Isaac did not resist, but willingly suffered himself to be bound and laid on the altar, so the Son of God would willingly give Himself a sacrifice for men. So Abraham saw the day of Christ in the Word of promise and in manifold typical acts which he performed by the command or under the guidance of God.

And now let us mark well this little word *saw*: "Abraham saw my day." A strong testimony for Abraham's great faith. He was not only of the opinion that these things were so; he did not only think they would come to pass; he did not only hope it would be so, with the doubt lurking in the background

of his heart that it might fail; he *saw* them, he was positive of them as of the things which he discerned with his natural eye; he was certain of his salvation in the promised Seed; he was so fully persuaded of it that he rejoiced over it and was glad. Therefore Paul writes: "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness."

From all this it is very clear, to be true children of Abraham, to be counted righteous as Abraham was, to have part in "the blessing of Abraham," and finally to be carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom, we must see the day of Christ, or in other words, we must see the salvation of our souls in the promised Seed of Abraham. What must we do to see in Jesus Christ "the power of God and the wisdom of God" unto our salvation?

II.

In order to see an object we must look in the right direction and at the right place. Though a man look for a treasure ever so eagerly, unless he looks at the right place, he will never find it. The man that looks for the polar star, but has his eye continually turned to the south or east will never see it. If we would see the day of Christ we must not have our eye turned to our own works of piety, as the Pharisees did. They saw Christ with their bodily eyes, but the eyes of their heart and mind remained fixed on their own piety and good works and, looking to these for their righteousness, they could not see their salvation in Jesus Christ. To see the day of Christ we must not look to the works which we do, we must look to the works which Jesus Christ has done. Our salvation stands in the work of Christ, not in our works. To see the day of Christ we must look to Christ.

Where Christ is it is day. "*Abraham saw my day.*" Jesus Christ is a bright and shining light. This is His testimony concerning Himself, when He says: "I am the light of the world," and the prophet calls Him "the Sun of righteousness." Where does the light of Christ shine? In the fourth chapter, 2d Corinthians Paul writes: "The god of this world hath

blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." In the Gospel the light of the day of Christ shines. There we must look for it. In systems of philosophy and earthly science this light is not found. "The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." 1 Cor. 3, 19. To see the day of Christ we must look to the Gospel of Christ and not to the teachings of any man, save only in so far as he brings the Gospel.

Looking to the Word of revelation we must not so look as to bring light to the Gospel, but so as to receive light from it. We must not want to carry light to the sun. The natural eye does not give light to the sun, it receives its light from the sun. We must look to the Gospel as such who of themselves are without light and we must receive light from it. This is a point of great importance. Frequently we can hear people say: It says so in the Bible, but I understand it to mean this or that. Though such words may proceed from a desire of searching for the right meaning, yet in most cases it is carrying the light of human understanding to the Gospel. When we read the Bible we must not put on the spectacles of our own ideas and opinions to read them into it and to make the Word suit to our own preconceived notions. To so do is to make our opinions the true and greater light. We must so look that the light comes from the Gospel to us, and not from us to the Gospel. We must not want to correct the Word according to our understanding, but the Word is to correct our opinions. We must never alter or pervert the Word, as the Jews here did. Christ said: "*Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it.*" They retorted: "*Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?*" They turned the words right around. Christ shines in the Word of the cross, and this Word we must not pervert, or we render the light itself darkness, and then all is darkness. We must look to the Word, not as we would construe it, but as the Holy Ghost has construed it.

Looking to the Gospel our chief object must be to see Christ and His salvation. Now we see Christ and His salvation, if

we receive the things which the Word promises as realities and appropriate them unto ourselves. When the Word says: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," our heart should respond: He saves me, a sinner. When we read: "I am the Lord that healeth thee," we should rejoice and say: My soul is sick, but my Lord Jesus Christ healeth all my diseases. When the Lord says: "I go to prepare a place for you," we should joyously conclude: When I move out of my earthly dwelling I will find a mansion ready prepared in the house of the Father. So to appropriate the Gospel promises is seeing the day of Christ; for where this faith is, this dependence on the things which eye can not see, nor the senses perceive, there the day-star arises in the heart and hope fills the soul. Allow me a limping comparison. I see that the object before me is a book. This I discern with the natural eye, and I am positive of it. In this book One is speaking to me, and He says: "I am the resurrection and the life." This I can not see with the natural eye, yet by the grace of God my heart is positive that it is a fact, a reality, Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life: He will raise me up again from the dead and will bring me into a new life in which I will live with Him forever. That is seeing with the eye of faith, which is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Hebr. 11, 1.

O I look, and I know that the Gospel of Christ alone is the light of my soul, and sometimes I discern clearly that Jesus Christ is in very deed the way, the truth and the life, but alas! it is not always so. At other times I look and see but dimly, and even total darkness will fall upon me that I can see no hope and can realize no salvation. If this is your experience you are making the experience of all the children of God. Therefore we should know, and we should well remember, that the possession of grace and salvation is not dependent on the clearness of our seeing, or the strength of our faith, but on our looking. There is a difference between looking and seeing. In a thick fog you may look toward the mountain, but you will not see it. The looking to Christ is indispensably necessary, but not so the seeing. If you do not look to Christ you are not a child of

Abraham; for Abraham looked to the promised Seed for his salvation. But if you look to Christ and can not see, or think you can not see, you need not despair. They that look to Christ are His. It is a high praise of Abraham's faith that he is called "the father of the faithful," yet even he did not see alike clearly at all times. When he complained that the son of his servant would be his heir he saw but very dimly. "Now we see through a glass darkly," says Paul. 1 Cor. 13, 12. The Lord desires the looking; for by the prophet He has promised and said: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." Is. 45, 22. The looking has the promise of salvation. Your looking to Christ is conclusive evidence that the Holy Ghost is in you and has His work in your heart, otherwise you would be looking elsewhere and not to Christ. Keep on looking and He will grant you to see. If on a foggy morning you keep on looking to the mountain the fog will by and by clear away, the spurs and peaks become visible, and in the tints of the morning light the mountain seems more lovely than ever before. If fog obstructs the vision of your spiritual eye, keep on looking. The Hill from which our salvation comes, will become visible to your faith again, and your soul will be filled with new delight.

Come, Thou Lamb for sinners slain,
Come, and ease me of my pain;
Evermore I cry to Thee:
Jesus, Jesus, come to me. Amen.

PALM SUNDAY.

CONFIRMATION.

FIRST ADDRESS.

TEXT: That which ye have already, hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give the morning-star. Rev. 2, 25-28.

In the second chapter of Acts St. Luke informs us that the first Christian church at Jerusalem continued steadfast in the worship of the Lord with one accord, and then he adds: "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." In those days of the youthful vigor of the church, when the Spirit was poured out so abundantly both upon teachers and hearers, the growth of the church was rapid. Daily were souls added to the community of the disciples, and so from a small beginning the number of believers soon became a great multitude. The cause of this rapid growth was the abundance of the Spirit given; for it was the time when the Lord planted His church of the New Covenant. Yet the godly walk of those first Christians contributed not a little to the increase of the church. So strong was their faith that many of them sold their worldly possessions and gave the proceeds for the common benefit of the church. They were of one heart and one soul, and were perfectly joined together in the same mind and faith. Because this was the mind of the first company of believers at Jerusalem, therefore also persecution, which early came upon them, could not prevent the increase of the church, but the persecutors had to experience that the blood of the martyrs only served to draw others unto the Lord. And as in the beginning so through all ages the Lord has upheld His church against the ravings of Satan and the persecutions of the wicked, and unto this day the gracious Lord continues to add unto His church.

At this place too the Lord planted a church, endowing it with the fulness of the Gospel. A century ago, in the year 1794,

God gave it into the hearts of a few men, four in number, to build a house of worship at this place, and small as their number was, hard as the struggle must have been for them, the Lord prospered the work of their hands. And what your forefathers began in poverty and under difficulties, God has preserved unto this day. The church which your fathers founded at this place has, of course, not been spared opposition and enmity, but though at times the prospects were gloomy, yet the Lord always awakened men in singleness of heart to stand for truth and right, and the prophecy of those who said, if the fathers were fallen asleep this church too would soon fall in line with the liberalism of the times, has been put to shame. So the Lord preserved the vine He planted, prospered it and caused it to spread forth its branches, from time to time adding new branches unto it.

How many a time has the overthrow of the Christian church been prophesied! The infidels of the preceding century foretold the early abolition of Christianity, but they were false prophets. Their bones have decayed, but the church remains. The truth of the Gospel will endure till the moon will wax and wane no more. As long as men will live upon earth there will be hearts which sing with the 100th Psalm: "The Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting: and his truth endureth to all generations."

Again a company of youthful Christians have appeared here in public to vow allegiance unto the Lord and His church. Let us remind them of their duties and consecrate them to God with the laying on of hands and prayer. Hence allow me a few words on

THE KEEPING OF THE LORD'S WORKS

- I. As to what they are;
- II. As to what it will require of you to keep His works.

I.

Our text is taken from the missive of the Lord by John to the church of Thyatira, but these words were not only intended for

that church in Asia, they are written for the admonition of every individual Christian. The Lord is here speaking to you, my young friends, as well as to those Christians at Thyatira. To you, too, He says: "*That which ye have already, hold fast till I come.*" That which you have already, the Lord bids you not to cast away, not to lose, but to hold it fast until He comes, comes by a peaceable death to take you from this world of strife, or comes in the clouds of heaven to judge the quick and the dead. What you have already you are to hold fast. What have you already? You have been instructed in the knowledge of God and your Savior. You have not been led to connect with the church without understanding God's plan of salvation. You have been taught the counsel of God for the salvation of sinners. You have learned sufficient to know what to believe, how to live and how to die in order to be saved. You have learned that even by nature you are altogether corrupt and have not kept one command of God, and this you to-day acknowledge; but you have also learned that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the propitiation for your sins, that through faith in Him His righteousness is accounted unto you and you are made children and heirs of the Father in heaven, and that this is your heart's faith and trust you to-day confess. If then you have the knowledge of sin and believe that for Christ's sake your sins are forgiven, you are children of adoption, possessing the grace of God; for the Word of the Lord declares: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Mark 16, 16. If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and are baptized in His name, salvation is yours and you need nothing more to possess the grace of God, but you are the children of God. And I am persuaded, that you to-day do not make a deceitful confession, but what your lips confess is the faith of your heart. Now the Scripture saith: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Rom. 10, 9.

But now the Lord says unto you: "*That which ye have al-*

ready, hold fast till I come." The faith that you now have you are to hold fast until the Lord comes. The same he repeats: "*And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end.*" His works you are to keep unto the end. What are His works? All creatures are the works of God, but of the works of creation He is here not speaking. He that is here speaking is Jesus Christ, the Mediator between God and man. He says: "*My works.*" What are His works? His work is that He became poor on earth to make you heirs of heaven; His work is that He bare your sins in His own body on the tree, that sin be accounted unto you no more, and the curse be removed from you; His work is that He tasted all the bitterness of death that the second death should not touch you; His work is that He descended into hell triumphantly, that your souls might be delivered from the power of darkness; His work is that He rose from the dead to justify you and to adorn you with His righteousness; His work is that He ascended on high to prepare a mansion for you; His work is that He sits at the right hand of the Father, making intercession and pleading for you; His work is that He grants you His Spirit and, as the good Shepherd, leads you to green pastures, and will all your lifetime so guide and govern you that you may reach the mansion prepared for you in heaven. Behold, these are His works, as you have learned them from the second article of the Creed, and you to-day publicly testify before God and man that these His works are your salvation.

And now the Lord says unto you: "*He that overcometh and keepeth my works unto the end.*" These His works you must keep unto the end. How can you keep His works? Certainly in no other way than by holding them fast. The works of Jesus Christ you keep when you hold them fast as the comfort of your heart, the foundation of your hope; for His works are kept by faith. You keep His works, if you keep the faith, and to this the Lord earnestly and solemnly admonishes you: "*Hold fast that ye have; keep my works.*" O! that I could engrave these words on your hearts with indelible letters that you could never forget them. What would you be benefited if to-day you believe, but hereafter throw away faith? "When

the righteous," says the Lord, "turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, all his righteousness shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die." Ex. 18, 24. Not those who once believed and fell away again, only those who keep His works unto the end will be found worthy to stand before the Son of man. So long as you keep the door-posts of your heart marked with the blood of Jesus the destroyer must pass you by. Keep, O keep His blood in your hearts as the price with which your souls are purchased that at your latter end you may be able to commend your souls into His hands, saying: Lord Jesus, Thou hast redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature; Thou hast purchased and won me from all sin, from death and the power of the devil by Thy holy and precious blood; Thine I am, and Thou shalt keep my soul.

II.

But think it not an easy task to keep the Lord's works. If your life is prolonged on earth, you will experience that, where there is a treasure, there are also thieves who would steal it. In our text the Lord says: *Hold fast; overcome; keep.* *Hold fast;* for there are those who would take the treasure from you. *Overcome;* for there are those who will fight against you. *Keep;* for there is a possibility of losing the treasure. You can not remain untried; temptations will come to you, and often they will come in a way, shape and form in which you would never have expected it. The time may come when you will be tempted to turn your back on the Lutheran church, which is in all disrepute with the world, because it adheres so closely to the Word, and to go to some other church which makes more show before men, and is more in favor with the world. God grant that you may then remember that, after being instructed in the true doctrine of the Gospel, you vowed faithfulness to this doctrine even unto death, and that, if you break this vow, you deny the truth of that Lord who has said: "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father

with the holy angels." Mark 8, 38. You know that that alone is the truly orthodox church which is ashamed of none of the Lord's words, which in her teachings abides in every word that proceeded from the mouth of the Lord. Let this mind abide in you that, whatever word the Lord has spoken, you are ready to receive it and to bow to it, be it never so hateful to the flesh, or offensive to men. You have learned that all the teachings of our Evangelical Lutheran church are founded on the clear, plain Word of the Lord. Do, therefore, what Paul commands Timothy: "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of." 2 Tim. 3, 14.

The time will come, when you will be tempted by the lust of sin, the glitter of gold, the honor of the world; but remember always that sin, however tempting and innocent it may appear, is that deadly poison which brought woe on all our race; that you brought nothing into the world and can carry nothing out, and that they who love the praise of men rather than the praise of God can not be the children of God.

What particular trials are in store for you, what temptations will come upon you, I do not and can not know. We live in the last times of the world when offenses multiply, and sore trials may come to you. You may be called on for the Lord's sake to pluck out your right eye and to cast it from you; you may be obliged to prove that you love the Lord more than father or mother, son or daughter, yea, more than life itself; for the powers of darkness are at work and they are waxing stronger. Satan seems to be preparing for his last and greatest struggle. But be ye not dismayed. Be faithful unto the Lord, and you will always find Him a very present help in every need. "Greater," writes the apostle John to all Christians, "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world." 1 John 4, 4. The Lord to whom you to-day consecrate yourselves is greater than all the powers of darkness. Whatever may betide, look to Him and He will uphold you with the right hand of His righteousness. Only remember what Paul writes of Him: "He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and

rose again." 2 Cor. 5, 15. Live unto Him who died for you, and help and strength, light and comfort shall never be lacking you; for He rose again and sits on the throne of the Father, a Lord over all.

Because He is Lord over all, His promises are sure and can not fail you. He says: "*He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him I will give the morning-star.*" The morning star. The blessedness of the saints in the New Jerusalem. Let not that morning star be obscured in your mind, neither by stormy clouds, nor by cares and pleasures and riches of this world. Keep it in view. Keep the works of the Lord; hold fast that ye have, and when you close your eyes in death the messengers of the Lord will be in waiting to carry your soul upward into the full brightness of that morning star, and the goodly company of the saints in light will greet you with gladness, and your ear will be ravished by the voice of the Lamb, saying: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Amen.

PALM SUNDAY.

CONFIRMATION.

SECOND ADDRESS.

TEXT: And now, little children, abide in him; that when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming. 1 John 2, 28.

'All men, and therefore we too, are sinners by nature. When man is born into this world he is in a condition in which he is not an heir of righteousness and salvation, but an heir of sin and damnation. In the condition in which man is born he can not be saved; for "that which is born of the flesh, is flesh," and "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." 1 Cor. 15, 50.

But God is love. He is not willing that any should perish. He desires the life and salvation of all. Therefore He sent His Son to redeem our race, and through the work of Jesus Christ He established a kingdom of grace on earth; a kingdom into which He would fain receive all sinners; a kingdom in which He governs us with grace, in which He prepares us for salvation and out of which He finally transplants us into the kingdom of everlasting glory.

The means through which God receives man shortly after his birth, the means which God has ordained especially for the introduction of infants into His kingdom of grace, is baptism. Though baptism seems an insignificant ceremony to the natural eye, yet in it the doors of the kingdom of God are thrown open. The carnal eye can see nothing in it save a little water, the carnal ear can hear nothing save a few words. Therefore to many thousands, though they have been baptized, baptism appears an indifferent or even contemptible thing. They lay no store by it. They do not believe that they received anything in baptism, and it would not trouble their mind if they

were not baptized. They find no comfort in their baptism and it is to them a thing without value.

Poor, deluded people! Together with baptism they throw away soul and salvation. They despise and reject the saving hand which the merciful God reaches down from heaven. Baptism is not a human invention, it is the Lord's own institution with the great and infallible promise: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." When we put away the tallow candle of carnal reason and consider baptism in the sunlight of Holy Writ, then we see its value. At Christ's baptism heaven was opened and the Holy Ghost descended and abode on Him. At every baptism heaven is opened unto him who is baptized and the Holy Ghost comes to him to make him His temple. Baptism is not simple water, it is water, as it were, streaked with the blood of Christ. As many as are baptized into Christ are baptized into His death and have put on His merits. When the multitude at Pentecost asked: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter answered: "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Acts 2, 38. Baptism works the forgiveness of sins, and "where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation." It brings the gift of the Holy Ghost, and where the Holy Ghost is there is the temple of God.

Every one having spiritual eyes to see will consent, that great and wonderful is the work which God performs through baptism. It is an ever-flowing fountain of grace and salvation, an inexhaustible well-spring from which the baptized Christian can dip day for day, and grace for grace. It is the covenant of the unchangeable God who cannot break His promises, though the hills be removed and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.

This sacred washing of regeneration you received in your infancy. Bringing you to baptism your parents brought you unto the Lord who made you His children and heirs of everlasting salvation. You have learned what the covenant of baptism is, and you to-day renew and confirm it. You do not act in

ignorance. You have learned amply enough of the Christian doctrine to know the way unto salvation and you to-day vow to be the Lord's. And now I admonish you:

CHILDREN, ABIDE IN HIM.

Let me remind you

- I. What it is to abide in Christ; and
- II. What you must do to abide in Him.

I.

The apostle John wrote this epistle in his old age, and he addresses the Christians in these words: "*And now, little children, abide in him.*" These are the words which I desire to impress upon your minds. You have been led to Jesus. You have been taught who and what He is and what is His office, and I am persuaded that you have learned to know Him as the friend and savior of your souls. *And now, children, abide in Him.* I have lifted up my heart in prayer, imploring for you the gift of the Holy Ghost that He should Himself write these words into your hearts with living and fiery letters. *Children, abide in Him.* What is it to abide in Jesus?

To abide in Jesus your first and foremost aim must be to abide in the faith of Christ, to hold the Gospel of Christ in faith unfeigned. You know that He came down from heaven to prepare all things which are necessary for the salvation of your souls. You know, He came in the likeness of sinful flesh to condemn sin in the flesh, and He humbled Himself to suffer a painful and shameful death that you might enjoy the liberty of the children of God. You know, it was for your sake He bare that heavy load of base reproach and sore distress, which finally pressed Him down into Joseph's rockbound sepulchre. He purchased you not with gold or silver, but His holy and innocent blood dripped from numberless wounds, a ransom for your souls. You know that He rose again from the dead in proof that your redemption is finished, and that He ascended to heaven to prepare mansions for you and to plead your cause on the right hand of the Father. You know that Jesus is the

good shepherd, your shepherd, who has guided you with all grace and mercy from the days of your infancy and who has already planned how to guide you step by step throughout life, and finally to receive you unto Himself in heaven. O never, never cast Him off. Abide in the faith that He is your life and your salvation.

Let not your hearts be turned to the infidelity and skepticism which is now so prevalent in the world. Remember the words of the 14th Psalm: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." The infidels have done abominable works, and if the world endures yet for a while they will do many more abominable works. Beware and cast not your lot with them. Lend not your ear to philosophy falsely so called, and let not the wisdom of this world shake your faith in the Gospel of Christ. It has stood the test of the ages and it will abide till to the Lord's coming. Neither let your faith be corrupted by the traditions of men. As the Lord foretold, in the latter days many false prophets would arise and would deceive many, so it is even now. In enticing words of wisdom and learning men do now circulate their own opinions under the title of the Gospel, and, pretending to be the Bible's warmest friends, they are busily at work to undermine the very foundations on which our Christian religion rests. I therefore to-day charge you to remember, that I have taught you the right Gospel as it has been handed down to us by the evangelists and apostles, and if any man would teach you another Gospel, beware of that man. Beware also of that common and fashionable saying: It would make no difference what a man believes, if he would only live right. The apostle Paul says the contrary when he writes: "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." Gal. 5, 4. You abide in Christ, if you remain penitent sinners, acknowledging that you have no righteousness before God save in Jesus Christ alone, and say with the poet of old:

Thou must save, and Thou alone;
In my hand no price I bring;
Simply to Thy cross I cling.

Abiding in the faith of Jesus you can not otherwise, you will abide in the love of Jesus. He loved you before ever the world was; He bled and died for you before you were born, and this His everlasting love to you has kindled love to Him in your hearts. With gladness of heart you say: My Beloved is mine and I am His. Abide in His love. Let not your hearts be turned from the love of Jesus by the pleasures of sin or the treasures of this world. To-day you are full of zeal for the Lord. To-day you say:

One it is for whom I'm living
Whom I love most tenderly;
Jesus! ever to Him giving,
What in love He gives to me;

but, doubtless, for you too the day will come, when the tempting lust of sin will approach your hearts, when the glitter of gold will entice your eyes. Then beware that you cast not away the love of Jesus; then remember that to love Jesus is far better than to possess all the treasures of India. Let your zeal for the Lord know no languor. Let not your love to Jesus ever decrease, but let it continually increase more and more. Do not make the Lord to complain of you, as He complained of the church at Ephesus: "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." Rev. 2, 4. Rather let His love continually grow in your hearts.

If you will abide in the faith and love of Jesus your hearts can never be void of hope. Where there is faith and love there is also hope. If you say in your hearts: My Savior is mine and I am His, you will not look forward to the day of His coming like a criminal, conscious of guilt, expects the coming of the judge, but rather like a bride awaits the coming of her groom. Faith, love and hope are linked together. Abide in the Lord through faith, holding fast the forgiveness of sin in Him; increase in the love of Jesus, and you will have the confidence that you need "*not be ashamed before him at his coming.*" The more you grow in the Lord according to the inner man, the more will you realize the certainty of His grace and your sal-

vation, and you will joyously say: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Rom. 8, 35. And the Spirit within you will respond: "Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

II.

You will perhaps say in your heart: This we know, if we do abide in the Lord Jesus Christ we are safe, safe for time, safe for eternity; but we are weak, the enemies are many and strong, and what shall we do to abide in Him? Certainly a very proper question for you on this day.

You are aware that men answer this question in different ways. A monk would say: To abide in the favor of God you must do as I do, you must seclude yourselves from the world. Good as this advice appears it is nevertheless worthless. Though you would go to a remote wilderness, where never another human being would come into the reach of your eyes, you would soon discover that you carried the world with you in your own flesh and blood. Others would tell you: You must gird your loins and must progress on in sanctification until you have reached sinless perfection and can no more fall. This advice is even worse than the former, because it is directing to the way of hypocrisy, as it is written: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." 1 John 1, 8.

To abide in Jesus you must totally despair of your own power and strength to perform what you promise to-day. As you can not by your own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, your Lord, or come to Him, so you can not by your own reason or strength abide in Him. That lusty warrior of the Lord, the father of the reformation, sang:

With might of ours can naught be done,
Soon were our loss effected.

If you depend on your own determination and strength of character to keep your vow, you will not be found among those who

need "*not be ashamed before him at his coming.*" Whence your ability to perform your pledge must come, the apostle Peter tells you when writing: "Ye are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." 1 Pet. 1, 5. You must look to God for your strength. The same power which brought you to the Lord Jesus must also preserve you in Him.

To bestow His gifts and to perform His works in the heart God has appointed certain means, the Word and the sacraments. These you must diligently use. You must hear His Word; you must often call to remembrance the covenant made in baptism; you must frequently come to the sacrament of the altar. These ordinances are not human contrivances, they are the means of grace instituted by God Himself, and He will not leave those without witness who diligently use them. They will experience what the Lord says: "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." John 7, 16. I exhort you through the Lord Jesus Christ unto a diligent use of the means of grace. Forget not the covenant of grace which God established with you; absent not yourselves from the Lord's table; hear the Word of God every Lord's day so long as strength and ability is granted you to go to the house of worship. Read the Scriptures when at home; ponder them when at work; persevere in these things.

Using the means of grace diligently you must take heed lest you ascribe some merit unto yourselves. "Neither is he that planteth anything," says the apostle, "neither he that watereth: but God that giveth the increase." 1 Cor. 3, 7. Whenever you use the means of grace neglect not to call upon God to give the increase. As often as you open your Bible, as often as you set your foot in the house of God, let the prayer arise from your heart: Lord, let Thy Word take root and bring fruit within me. As often as you approach the Lord's table do so sighing: Lord, let this food be unto me the strengthening of my faith unto life eternal. You can rest assured, if you grow cold in prayer the spiritual life within you will wither, and if you cease to pray you cease to be Christians. Be instant in prayer. Call upon

the name of the Lord in the night and praise Him in the morning. To abide in the Lord you must abide in the use of the means of grace, and you must continue in prayer.

If you would not fall away from the Lord you must also not expose yourselves to the temptation of being led astray. If you will frequent those places where you hear pernicious teachings and see evil examples, you will quickly fall away. If you associate with the profane, you learn profanity. The companions of the unclean will become the victims of impurity; for "evil communications corrupt good manners." The young man who keeps the company of drunkards will not remain temperate. Wicked examples seduce innocent souls. Sit not where the scoffers sit; sit with those whose delight is in the law of the Lord.

Life is before you, and before you grow old many temptations and trials will come upon you. God grant, that you never waver from His ways. But if some of you, enticed by Satan, the world and your own flesh, should fall away from the Lord that bought you, may God early grant you grace unto repentance that you may say with the prodigal: "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee." Luke 15, 18. You have been taught how to walk and to please God, and I to-day charge you to give heed to these things and to abide in the Lord Jesus Christ, and when He comes you will have confidence to meet Him with rejoicing. The God of grace, of strength and of perseverance abide with you. Amen.

MAUNDY THURSDAY.

TEXT: Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. And supper being ended, (the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him,) Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; he riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded. Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean. So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. John 13, 1-15.

Maundy Thursday commemorates the institution of the Lord's supper. In former ages it was universally celebrated and at many places the church doors are still opened for public worship on this day. In our country the day is very little observed, and many do not know what it means when they read the name in the almanac. That the observance of this day has so generally fallen into desuetude is owing to the doctrine and practice of those who regard the Lord's supper nothing more than an emblematic meal of remembrance. To them the institution of the Lord's supper appears of little importance.

But when we lay aside the spectacles of our own corrupt reason and with an unbiased mind examine what the Lord's supper is according to the Scriptures, we must conclude that the institution of this sacrament is well worthy to be held in thankful remembrance by all Christians in all lands and of all denominations.

In proof of this it is sufficient to mention this one single fact that the Lord calls this supper His testament saying: "This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you." Luke 22, 20. The Lord's supper is the Lord's testament, and we all know, a testament is an instrument by, in and through which the possessions of him who makes the testament are conveyed to his heirs. A testament is an instrument by which the testator makes his heirs the possessors of his property. By a testament we do not—and certainly no court will—understand such an instrument by which the testator conveys a figure, picture or emblem of his property to his heirs. A testament conveys the property itself. Who ever heard of a wealthy man making a testament in which he conveyed only a picture and emblem of his property to his children and not the property itself? Such a testament would be counted a mockery.

Now our Lord Jesus Christ is a rich man. In the days of His flesh He acquired great riches, not to keep them for Himself, but to bestow them on men. In His incarnation He assumed a human body and received human blood, so that they became the body and the blood of the Son of God. With these He went to purchase our souls from the claims of Satan and the demands of eternal justice, and He did purchase our liberty by giving His body and blood a ransom for us. That the price of our liberty has been paid in full God the Father acknowledged by raising up Jesus from the dead. This rich Lord has made a rich testament. In it He gives us the price of our liberty, His body and blood; for these are the words of His testament: "Eat; this is my body. Drink; this is my blood." Giving us the price of our redemption He assures us that we are free indeed. Surely, a valuable testament, conveying valuable goods. If pious children esteem the testament of their father a precious document when it conveys only earthly goods, with

how much greater veneration should we receive the testament of our Lord.

The better we learn to understand what the Lord's supper is and what it brings, the more will we appreciate it, the oftener will we desire it, and the more will we learn to partake of it with joy and thanksgiving, and not with doubt and misgiving. How to receive the Lord's testament worthily we may learn from:

THE LORD'S WASHING THE DISCIPLES' FEET,

teaching us, I. Humility; II. Faith; III. Godliness.

I.

Although the institution of the Lord's supper is not mentioned in our text, it narrates an occurrence which took place in connection with it, and which, in a very simple manner, teaches us what to do and how to conduct ourselves before, during and after communing. From the Lord's own behavior we are to learn humility. St. John writes: "*Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God and went to God; he riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself.*" While the mind of Jesus was occupied with the thoughts of His divinity and the glory which was given Him of His Father He arose and prepared to do the work of a menial. Here is illustrated what Paul writes, Phil. 2, 6: "He thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant." We can imagine no greater example of humility than that the Lord over all things kneels to wash the feet of sinful mortals. His intention of teaching them humility is clearly expressed in the words: "*Ye call me Master, and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.*" As the Son of God humbled Himself and came to minister, despising not to perform the meanest service to His disciples, so

should we be of an humble mind and ready to serve one another.

When we come to the Lord's supper we should come meek and lowly in heart. Haughty and overbearing behavior is never becoming a Christian, and least of all at the communion table. Let not your dress and behavior be such that you will be numbered with the proud. And we should be particularly careful to guard against spiritual pride. Say not in your heart: "I am as good as any in this congregation; I have lived right and have given liberally to the church and the poor; neither am I behind others in following sanctification." That is the language of spiritual pride, and the apostle commands the contrary, saying: "In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." Phil. 2, 3. To be so minded every one of us has abundant reason. For instance, I myself have passed through a course of theological studies and obtained a fair knowledge of the Christian doctrine. I have also an inner eye to see spiritual things spiritually. Have I reason to pride myself in these things? Indeed not. When I was a poor, shy boy God took me and made me a minister of the Gospel, and that inner eye is purely the gift of the Holy Ghost. To take pride therein would be an extremely foolish thing; for an unlettered laborer may possess a brighter spiritual eye and a heart more settled in the love of God, even as the Lord says in the 11th chapter of Matthew: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." In a sermon on these words Dr. Luther very pertinently says: "It may be a learned doctor whom He calls a babe; and likewise it may be a peasant whom He calls wise and prudent; for the Lord here calls those people babes who lay no store by their own doings, ascribe nothing unto their own power and count themselves nothing, and who account God alone wise and prudent. Therefore they are quiet and submit themselves wholly to God, and are taught by Him. The others are wise in their own conceit, and are not willing to learn of God; yea, even presume to master God's Word and work." When we come to the Lord's table

it is of the highest importance that we do not exalt ourselves, but remembering our weakness we should be ready to bow to the least of God's children; for the Lord instituted this sacrament to strengthen our faith and to brighten the eye of our hope, and if we think ourselves strong and wise we can derive no benefit from it.

And we all have great reason to be humble before our God, because we have broken His commandments and have soiled our souls. Though we strive to cleanse our hearts and to wash our hands in innocency, like Asaph did, yet we must all bear witness to the truth of the Lord's words when He says: "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man." Matt. 15, 19. Sinful by nature we have defiled ourselves from year to year. Instead of being lifted up we should look for a fountain in which to wash and be clean. Thanks be to our God who has prepared such a fountain in Jesus Christ.

II.

When the Lord with basin and towel came to Peter to wash his feet Peter refused, saying: "*Lord, dost thou wash my feet?*" He meant to say: Thou art my Lord, and shouldst thou wash my feet? To wash the feet of their masters and of guests was the work of slaves. When Abraham entertained those three angels he did not himself wash their feet, he had water brought and had it done by his servants. Therefore when the Lord kneeled before Peter to do this menial work for him Peter refused. He did not want his Master to abase Himself so far.

The Lord argued with Peter and said: "*What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.*" The Lord argued, though this must appear strange to Peter, yet he should suffer it, in aftertime he would learn to understand it. But Peter thought this so unworthy a thing that he had no ear for arguments; he flatly refused declaring: "*Thou shalt never wash my feet.*" Peter had seen the Lord perform so many and great miracles, he had seen His glory on the mount of transfiguration,

he had confessed Him the Son of the living God and the promised King of Israel, and now he was to stretch out his feet for the Lord to wash them? Peter thought, he understood very well what footwashing meant, and he counted it such a disgrace that he could not permit it. But the Lord quickly broke Peter's resistance, declaring unto him: "*If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.*" His literal footwashing was to remind the disciples of the spiritual washing, the cleansing of the soul from sin, the same washing of which He speaks in the words of institution, saying: "Given and shed for you for the remission of sins." Jesus Christ is come to wash the soul from sin, and in Him is the only single one fountain which can cleanse the soul. If Jesus had not washed Peter from his sins he never would have become rid of them and they would have dragged his soul down to the pit of destruction. If Jesus Christ does not wash our souls they will remain filthy to all eternity. Of His day the prophet had said: "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness." Zech. 13, 1. There is only this one fountain, but it is an open fountain, free to all, and it does in very deed what the poet says:

There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.

If you would be cleansed from sin you must apply to Jesus Christ, and for this purpose He has instituted His testament, ever anew to assure us of the cleansing from sin by His blood. As often as we receive the sacrament of His body and blood we should say unto our soul: Because the Lord has bequeathed unto me the price with which He purchased me, there can be no doubt that He washes me from my sins.

Hence we should never suffer ourselves to be debarred from the Lord's table by a mistaken humility. It was a mistaken humility when Peter thought it an unworthy thing for the Lord to wash his feet; and it is a mistaken humility, when some

think and say, they could never approach the Lord's table to receive that sacred sacrament with their sinful and unclean lips. They know themselves unworthy sinners and they fear they might profane the Lord's sacred body and blood. It is indeed a great and wonderful thing that the Lord, together with the bread, gives His body to be received orally by sinners, but this very fact shows that those cannot be unwelcome or unworthy guests who deplore their sins and desire to be rid of them. Did Jesus Christ come into the world to stand aloof from sinners? Did He say to sinners: Stand ye at a distance and approach me not? Did He withdraw His holy feet from that woman who kissed them with her lips, when Simon, the Pharisee, muttered that she was a harlot? Surely, the Lord must have a strong desire for familiar and intimate intercourse with sinners, because He could not wait for an invitation, but invited Himself to the house of Zaccheus. He is come to save sinners, to make the unholy holy, the unclean clean, and therefore He invites sinners to come to Him, and He instituted His testament to make the penitent sinners His heirs. The fact that we are sinners cannot make us unworthy guests at the Lord's table, because for this very purpose the Lord instituted this sacrament to certify penitent sinners of the forgiveness of their sins.

III.

But from this fact that the Lord's supper is for sinners we must in no way conclude that after receiving it we might go on in sin. We must not do like Peter who fell from the one extreme into the other. When the Lord told him: "*If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me,*" he at once said: "*Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.*" This was only an outburst of Peter's impetuous character, but the flesh will make a similar conclusion, that one might receive the Lord's supper unto forgiveness and then continue his former sinful life. Many commune time and again, and never amend their lives. How we should do is indicated in the Lord's answer to Peter saying: "*He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit.*"

This is a remarkable word showing the relation between justification and sanctification. To understand the word fully we must remember that the ancients had public baths in every city and wore only sandals. After taking a bath a man would soil his feet more or less on the way home and so he still needed to wash his feet. In justification the soul is made white and clean before God. Sin is canceled and Christ's righteousness is imputed, and therefore the Church, the company of justified ones, is holy and without blemish. Justification makes "*clean every whit*" in the sight of God. But then the justified sinner is to go and to cleanse his way, and following sanctification while we are yet in the flesh and this world so full of wickedness, is like walking along a dusty street. However much you try to keep free from dust it will settle on you and you cannot keep it off. The justified sinner is clean before God, but he cannot walk in this world without becoming soiled and so he needs daily to wash his feet. As the ancient in going from the public bath to his home aimed to avoid all dust and filth, so must we Christians walk circumspectly and must aim to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. From one communion to another we should be diligent to cleanse our way.

Have you been doing this since your last communion? Has it been your object to keep your feet clean, avoiding dust and filth? You promised to do this, and how have you kept your promise? Did you perhaps argue: In the Gospel there is an ever- and an overflowing fountain of grace, and you might make free to indulge in sin; for you could wash again? If this has been your sentiment, I tell you the wily enemy has caught you in a snare. It is a precious truth, and God forbid that I should in any way abridge that truth, there is grace, abundance of grace with our God; but a man who makes that abundance of grace an excuse and a pretext to walk in sin, that man is a lover of sin and a dupe of Satan. What! make the abundance of water a pretext for wallowing in the mire! Is that a dutiful child which says: Father and mother are so very good; therefore I will go and do what they have forbidden? That is logic invented in the kingdom of darkness, and if you have been guilty

of this dreadful insult against God you have great reason to kneel before your Maker and to implore pardon for so shamefully abusing His mercy.

Or did you perhaps argue: No man could keep altogether clear from sin any way, and it would do no harm to yield a little? Did you say: What of it, though a man did get drunk off and on, or take advantage in trade, or tell an untruth? for none could be without sin. If your thoughts have been on this line, let me ask you: Is that keeping the promise to amend your sinful life? Is that keeping the commandment to break it a little here and a little there? Did the Holy Ghost teach you to argue after this fashion? or is it the wisdom of the prince of darkness? Surely, you have reason to repent and to recover yourself out of the snare of the devil, whose captive you have been.

But if you can candidly say that it has been your endeavor to keep your feet clean, make no boast about it, or you might deceive yourself. The Scriptures testify: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Jer. 17, 9. In every one's heart are nooks and crooks of which he is himself not aware, and instead of saying much about our honesty we should rather pray: Search my heart, O my God, and try my reins, and lead me in the land of uprightness. Wash me in the fountain of Israel, the blood of Thy Son, and deny me not grace unto godliness, but

Grant that, according to Thy Word,
I henceforth godly live, O Lord.
And let me, after time is o'er,
Inherit life forevermore. Amen.

GOOD FRIDAY.

TEXT: Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him. And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and they put on him a purple robe, and said, Hail, King of the Jews! and they smote him with their hands. Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him. Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man! John 19, 1-5.

We have gathered together to-day for a service of sorrow and mourning. Every heart loving the Lord Jesus Christ and knowing the signification of this day is downcast and sad, and yet at the same time filled with exceeding great joy. We to-day remember the death of our Redeemer, the one true Friend of our souls; therefore are our hearts sad. But His death awakens in us the hope of eternal life; therefore are our souls glad. On the Jewish preparation day for the festival of Easter in the 33d or 34th year of the Christian era, Jesus of Nazareth died the shameful death of crucifixion on the top of Mt. Calvary, but He died willingly, giving His life for the life of the world. How could a Christian heart be able to pass by this day unnoticed? Should we not observe it with great solemnity and sadness? There are fanatics who say that there is nothing in the day, and that it is wrong for Christians to keep days which God has not instituted. We are aware that Good Friday is a day like other days, and we seek nothing in the day, but we do think that the dying-day of our Lord is worthy of commemoration. We remember the dying-day of our parents, and should we not remember the dying-day of Jesus who is more to us than father or mother, sister or brother? What! pass by unnoticed that day of the year on which my Lord died for me? I could not, though I would. As often as it recurs sadness possesses my heart, and I am constrained to say: Bridegroom of my soul, my love, my hope, my all, art Thou dead? Rose of Sharon, how art Thou torn by the fangs of the whirlwind?

Lily of the Valley, how art Thou trampled down? "Wherefore art Thou red in thine apparel, and Thy garments like him that treadeth in the wine-fat?" Is. 63, 2. Alas! my blood has stained Thy beauty; my sins have pierced Thee through with many sorrows.

Why such sadness? Is not His death our life and, therefore, a cause of rejoicing? His death is truly the source and the only source of our hope for a blessed life beyond the grave, but let me remind you of the fact that I and you are amongst the number of His crucifiers. True, four Roman soldiers did the work; they nailed Him to the cross; but if man had not sinned, those spikes would never have pierced His members. It is this which comes home to us forcibly when we earnestly ponder His suffering and death. We should to-day consider both that His works are our salvation, and our works His torment. To assist you in this permit me to speak to you on the words of Pilate:

"BEHOLD THE MAN."

- I. Behold the Man of suffering;
- II. Behold the man that caused Him suffering.

I.

In front of the judgment hall at Jerusalem was a wide, paved place called Gabbatha, that is, the Pavement. It will compare with our American courthouse square. On this public square the citizens assembled at stated times to hear the decrees of the governor and the publication of the laws. Very early in the morning of the day already mentioned, the high priests, the members of the high council, a large number of scribes and Pharisees and a multitude of people had flocked together on the Pavement. They stood there demanding of Pilate the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth and awaiting his decision; but Pilate, finding no fault in Jesus and knowing Him innocent of the charges brought against Him, was loath to yield to their demands. But the longer he hesitated the more clamorous did their cries become. Then Pilate thought, perhaps, if he would chastise Jesus and then show Him to the multitude, they would

be moved to compassion and would consent to let Him go. Therefore, when Jesus had been scourged, the governor brought Him out of the judgment hall and presented Him to the people with the words: "*Behold the man.*" He meant to say: Behold the miserable, the plagued, the tormented, the pitiable man! Look and see Him made like unto a crushed worm. Behold His woeful condition and demand no more, but let your hearts be softened towards Him. Pilate thought that the aspect of the Lord's woeful condition would soften the hearts of His enemies and, verily, in human calculation Pilate might justly expect that the sight of Him must move the Jews to compassion.

What a woeful, pitiable spectacle the Lord presented, standing on the steps of the judgment hall, we can to some extent picture to our minds by remembering what He had already suffered. Since the eating of the passover neither meat nor drink had passed His lips, nor had sleep rested on His eyelids. Bound and watched by slaves, He had spent the night in the palace of the high priest. At and after His trial before the high council He had been struck in the face with fists by the servants; He had been spitted on and maltreated in other ways. Hungry, thirsty, weary He was brought to the judgment hall. From there He was sent to king Herod, where He was mocked, and clad in a white garment, the costume of fools and charlatans. When He was brought back again Pilate delivered Him into the hands of the barbarian soldiers to be scourged. Of that dreadful instrument of torture, the scourge, we know nothing in our time and country. What a fearful instrument of torture it was, we understand, when we read that many a strong man breathed his last under the strokes of the Roman scourge. The scourge consisted of a number of leather thongs or whipcord fastened to the end of a cane or strong stick, and for severe torture little lumps of lead or small hooks were matted into the thongs. To strike a Roman citizen with the scourge was strictly forbidden by law, because every one who was struck with the scourge was disgraced and branded with infamy. It was used only for the punishment of slaves and criminals, and it was applied on the bare body. As a matter of course such an in-

strument lacerated the skin at the first stroke and swung by a strong man it laid bare the bones in a very short time. No wonder that many expired under the torture of the scourge.

So Jesus was scourged, and that it was done in the severest manner is evident from the circumstances. It was Pilate's object to have Him brought into such a dreadful plight that the sight of Him would move even the flinty hearts of the scribes and Pharisees to pity. He was delivered into the hands of Roman soldiers, and the Roman army at that time was mainly composed of hirelings from barbarian tribes. Those men who were accustomed to scenes of carnage and knew nothing of mercy took Jesus, and did their work as it was customary with the Romans. Taking Jesus into the inner court they undressed Him, baring His back and breast till to the hips. Then they most likely bound His hands to a low post or stake, so that He had to stand in a stooping posture. And now, behold how the sinewy arm of a soldier swings the scourge. The strokes clash on the holy body of the Lord; every sinew and nerve quivers; His flesh is torn and lacerated; His Divine blood springs from the wounds and trickles to the earth; particles of red are splashed into the face of him who is swinging the scourge. It is a bloody piece of work. Who could picture that frightful transaction to his mind without a shudder? Yet not a groan was heard and, bending low to look into the face of Jesus, you would have found it perfectly calm, perhaps contorted with pain, but without a trace of anger.

After this Jesus was mocked and taunted by the unfeeling soldiery. Because He had said: "I am a king," they dressed Him in a purple robe, in antiquity the badge of sovereignty, platted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, put a reed into His right hand to serve for a scepter and bent the knee unto Him, greeting Him: "*Hail, King of the Jews!*" They spat on Him, smote Him with their hands and took the reed and struck on the crown of thorns on His head. In this condition Pilate presented Him to the people, saying: "*Behold the man.*" Behold this pitiable object of commiseration on whom barbarians have spent all their cruelty. His whole body covered

with wounds, His head lacerated with thorns, His face swollen from strokes of the fist and disfigured with clotted blood, spittle and filth, thus stood "the King of the Jews" on the steps of the judgment hall at Jerusalem, the city of the Jews.

"I am a worm," He says in the 22d Psalm, "and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people." "He hath no form nor comeliness," says Isaiah 53, "and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him." Yea, who could have looked upon Him without being horrified? Must not every one, having a bit of human feeling in his heart, have turned his face away from Him?

To the torments of the body was added the anguish of the soul. Standing in front of the judgment hall He hears the cries of the multitude: "Away with him. Crucify him." Delivered by His own people into the hands of a heathen tyrant, and hearing their clamors for His crucifixion, His soul must surely have been pierced through with sorrow as with a dart, and had He spoken the bitter complaint must have dropped from His lips: My people, my people, whereby have I wronged thee? Did I not choose thee before all nations for mine own inheritance? Did I not deliver thee from all thine enemies and crown thee with blessings since olden time? And now thou thirstest for my blood, and condemnest me to death, even the death of the cross!

O! "*Behold the man!*" Deserted by His disciples; betrayed by His own people into the hands of an unjust judge; tortured by the heathen; every fiber of His body quivering with pain; the wrath of the Father bearing in upon Him, and His soul struggling with eternal death. If this cannot move our hearts they are harder than flint and more unfeeling than adamant. Go forth, go forth, all ye lovers of the Lord, with sorrow and mourning! Your King, the Bridegroom of your soul, is the Man of sorrows acquainted with grief. He has no more the appearance of a man; He is like unto a worm trodden and crushed. O that the woeful figure which the Lord pre-

sented, standing on the steps of the judgment hall at Jerusalem, were imprinted on our hearts indelibly, so that we could never for a moment forget what it cost the Lord to redeem us, as Luther so beautifully says in the Catechism: "Who hath redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death." I know it is a shocking, an appalling picture which I have been delineating this morning, but this is the purpose for which I ascended the pulpit to-day, to show what it cost the Lord to atone for sin; and if this does not make it plain to you that sin is not an insignificant thing, not a small matter before God, then I know not how to make it plainer.

But if we find that we can look upon the woeful figure of the Lord with a heart unmoved and cold, we should put our hand into our bosom to see if we have flesh and bone; for to behold the sufferings of the Son of God with a heart unmoved and impassive is something satanic and not human. Only a heart more than petrified, harder than granite, can do so. To look upon the sufferings of Christ unmoved is a plain proof that He does not dwell in the heart, and that Satan holds possession of it. Must not the members droop when the head suffers? How could that man be a temple of Christ who can jest when the Lord suffers? O let us greet Him and say:

O bleeding Head, and wounded,
And full of pain and scorn,
In mockery surrounded
With cruel crown of thorn!
O Head! once crowned with glory
And heavenly majesty,
But now despised and gory:
To-day I welcome Thee.

II.

But though it is true that no one can be a member of Christ who can look upon His sufferings unmoved, yet we must be on our guard that not a false kind of sorrow possess our hearts,

If we would bemoan and pity Him simply because He had to suffer so dreadfully; if we would weep over Him as we weep over those in great affliction, that would be a great offense against Him. It would be robbing Him of His highest honor and placing Him upon a level with other sufferers upon earth. That He became the lowest of the low, the greatest of all sufferers is His highest honor, the deed for which He will be praised to all eternity, for which the Father gave Him the promise: "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sins of many." Is. 53, 12. He was scourged to save us from the place of torment. He suffered Himself to be mockingly arrayed and greeted as a king to atone for the sins of pride, ambition and arrogance. Our first parents were not content with their blessed condition in the garden of Eden, they aspired to become gods, and by their ambition they brought sin and every evil on their posterity. What causes more enmity, strife, bloodshed and warfare than pride and ambition? When that red robe, the sign of royalty, was put on His shoulders, He doubtless remembered with anguish of soul the streams of blood which the ambition of proud men has caused the earth to drink in. He humbled Himself to endure the scourge and to be made a mock-monarch to deliver us from the power of darkness. We must therefore not sorrow over His sufferings; for these are our redemption; we must sorrow over that which caused Him suffering. We must not lament Him in us, we must lament us in Him. That woeful figure on the steps of the judgment hall is to remind us of our own misery, and should constrain us to exclaim: Behold the man! Behold the lost, the sinful, the wicked, the pervert, the degenerate child of wrath, for which the Son of God had to be brought to such a woeful condition!

The bodily condition of Christ when standing in front of the judgment hall pictures the condition of our souls. In Him was nothing unhurt. His whole body was covered with wounds. So are we. From the sole of the foot even unto the crown of

the head there is no soundness in us, but bruises of unrighteousness and putrifying sores of sin.

His countenance was covered with blood, filth and spittle, because our souls are deformed with evil desires and filthy lusts. He had to be brought to such a condition that men hid their faces from Him, because the soul of man was so deformed by the poison of the Old Serpent that the holy angels turned away their countenances in disgust. Nowhere can we obtain a better and more thorough knowledge of ourselves, than in the sufferings of Christ, our Substitute. In Him is our appalling misery, our unsearchable depravity pictured in vivid and living colors.

Calculate yourselves: As we could not be redeemed from our misery save alone by the suffering of such a high, great and incomparable person, the only begotten Son of God; as to heal our sickness and to remove our depravity the Infinite and Eternal One Himself had to be brought to such a woeful pass: must not our hearts tremble and our knees quake, because our depravity is so appallingly deep and great, namely infinite and eternal? We must not forget that the miserable One whom the Jews beheld from the Pavement, is the Lord of glory, and say yourselves, is the guilt of those for whose sake the Lord of glory had to undergo such shame and pain great or small? Our guilt must be infinite, because only the Infinite One could atone for it; it must be eternal, because the Eternal One had to be sacrificed to make satisfaction for it; it must be appalling, because His sufferings are so appalling.

Would you attempt to shift the guilt from off your shoulders? Would you say: I did not cry out: Crucify Him. I did not swing the scourge. Do what you will; acknowledge it, or acknowledge it not; I tell you, you are the man; and you must and you will acknowledge it, if not here on this earth, you will acknowledge it when your soul will be enveloped in the flames of torment, as John writes Rev., chap 1st: "Every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." We are the people. Our sins caused His suffering. Our transgressions were entwined

in the thongs of the scourge; our iniquities were platted into His crown and poisoned its thorns. If we had not sinned the Son of God would not have needed to suffer. Let us sorrow over His sufferings, but let us always say: Thine the pain, mine the guilt; Thine the fetters, mine the crime; Thine the shame, mine the blame.

In conclusion permit me to say: Let us sorrow over the sufferings of our Lord with rejoicing. Let us sorrow over them; for they were caused by our sins. Not for Himself, for us did He suffer. Let us confess and not deny that our iniquity is His pain, anguish, torment and shame. Let us confess and not deny: I am that wicked servant who brought death upon the Son of God; I am that vessel full of uncleanness whose guilt filled His cup of bitterness full to the brim.

On the other hand, let us not doubt, but believe what the Lutheran poet John Heermann says:

The pious dies who walked so true and faithful,
The wicked lives who 'gainst God sinned so dreadful;
Guilty of death, man punishment is spared,
God is ensnared.

And here in this text we have a peculiarly proper illustration of the fact that Jesus Christ bare the curse which was pronounced on the earth because of sin. Unto Adam God said: "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee." Behold here the Son of God crowned with a crown of thorns. On Him fell the curse with which this earth was cursed. He was made a curse for us that the blessing of Abraham might come upon us. Would you escape the curse? Hold to Him who was crowned with the curse of the earth, and it will remove from you, and yours shall be a crown of glory.

This is what our faith must grasp: He emptied the cup of wrath, and we are spared it. God spared not His own Son, but when He had once taken our punishment upon Himself, the Father made Him drink the cup of bitterness to the very dregs. *But by Him the cup has been emptied.* Make this your hope, cling to it that He drank the cup for you, and when you come to die, you will find it empty. Amen.

EASTER.

FIRST SERMON.

TEXT: And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. And very early in the morning, the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? (And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away :) for it was very great. And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. And he said unto them, Be not affrighted: ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter, that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you. And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed; neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid. Mark 16, 1-8.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to His abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,” thus glories the apostle Peter in the beginning of his first epistle. Fitly may we with the apostle lift up our hearts and voices in praise and thanksgiving unto God on this day in which we remember the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. Of all that our Lord and Saviour did, of all that transpired from the day of His birth to the day of His ascension to heaven, of all His works, His resurrection from the dead is the most important and the most comforting for us poor sinners. Christ’s resurrection proves His victory over death and all the powers of darkness to an evidence, and it brings to our view that inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled and which fadeth not away.

Easter was the first festival introduced in the Christian

church, and it is the chief festival in the whole church year. That the primitive church regarded the resurrection of Christ the most important of all His works, is evident from the fact that it chose and appointed the day of His resurrection to be the weekly day for public worship and called it the Lord's day. Of the great importance, or rather the absolute necessity of Christ's resurrection for the perfection of our redemption and salvation, St. Paul treats in the 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians, where he distinctly declares: "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished." On the resurrection of Christ from the dead depends all our faith, hope and salvation. If He had not risen again no one could have any certain assurance of eternal life. When He said on the cross: "It is finished," the work of atonement was finished; He had done what the law required, He had suffered what divine justice demanded; but without His resurrection we would have no declaration on the part of the Father that His work is accepted in heaven. Then we could only conclude that His work was rejected in heaven, because He was left in the power of death. Then we could, in fact, hope in Him only in this life, and in death there would not be a ray of hope for us. Then no one could cheerfully close his eyes in death commending his soul into the hands of Jesus and saying: My Redeemer lives and I shall live with Him. Then no one could hope for life in Christ, because a dead tree cannot bring forth the fruit of life.

But Christ is risen from the dead and therefore faith in Him is the victory which overcometh the world, the light which guides through the valley of the shadow of death. "Begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead," we can boast with Paul against the last enemy, saying: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

Rightly to understand the meaning of Christ's resurrection is of vital necessity; yea, it is the key to the right understanding of His whole work upon earth. Permit me to-day to choose

only the central words of this Gospel and to speak on the message of the angel:

HE IS RISEN.

I would set forth:

- I. What His resurrection proves; and
- II. How we should appropriate it unto ourselves.

I.

The history of those women going to the sepulchre early in the morning of the day after the Sabbath and the appearance of the angel unto them is well known to you, and I hope for your indulgence in not tarrying to repeat it. If we understand the main point the history will explain itself. As I said formerly concerning Christ's suffering, that it is not enough to know the history, we must also know the end and object of His suffering, the same must be said with regard to His resurrection; it is not enough to know how it occurred, the main point is that we know what it means, what it signifies, what it proves, otherwise we can derive no benefit from it.

If we would thoroughly understand the meaning of Christ's resurrection we must, above all things, keep in mind that He was raised from the dead as the "Son of man," the representative and substitute of all men; that He rose again not for His sake, but for our sake. Had He arisen for His sake He might have done so without making it public, without communicating it to men. This is the point from which we must set out, the foundation on which we must build our faith concerning the resurrection of Christ; for if we do not believe that He arose from the dead for our sake and for our benefit we could have "neither part nor lot" in His resurrection. To this end was He born and for this cause came He into the world, to be the representative and substitute of the whole human family, and what He did in the days of His flesh He did for us, in our stead, and therefore He also arose from the dead for our sake, as our substitute and representative. Paul establishes this with plain words when writing: "He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto

Him which died for them, and rose again." 2 Cor. 5, 15. As Christ in His suffering and death was the representative and substitute of all men; for He suffered and died in the sins of the world; so also in His resurrection. Let me attempt to illustrate what this means, reminding however that comparisons do not compare in all respects.

When peace was concluded between France and Germany after the late Franco-Prussian war, it was stipulated that France must pay so many millions war indemnity, and to secure the payment of this money Germany left an army stationed in France. After some time Germany recalled that army. What did the homeward march of those troops prove? It certainly proved that France had paid the stipulated sum of money and had paid it in full, otherwise Germany would have left its troops on French soil and would not have called them home. Similar with the resurrection of Christ. All the world was indebted to God and so long under the curse of God until its debt would be paid; and as the world was bankrupt and had not wherewithal to pay even the first farthing, it must have remained under the curse of God forever. But in the eternal council of the Holy Trinity the Son became security for the debt of the world, promising its payment, and this gracious counsel of God was graciously revealed to man on the selfsame day in which he had fallen into debt towards God, when a coming Deliverer was promised to Adam. And the Son, having once become surety for the world, came into the world as its substitute to pay the debt. He came to pay what He had not robbed, but He assumed the debt of the world, and bare it as His own, as He declares in the 40th Psalm, saying: "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head: therefore my heart faileth me." He calls the debt, which He had assumed, His own; for it is the sin of the world of which He says: "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me;" and this His complaint at the same time shows, how the Father exacted payment from Him, namely so that His heart failed Him, although He was the almighty God. The strictness of divine

justice demanded of Him the last farthing. He was stricken, smitten of God and afflicted, and finally cast into the bonds of death; but, although it cost Him His lifeblood, He did pay farthing for farthing, and could at last, bowing His head, say: "It is finished."

But now if the Father had left our bondsman in the prison of the grave whither our debt had brought Him, how could we then know, what proof would we then have that our debt is really and fully paid? In that case we would have no proof, we could show no receipt for the payment of our debt. We would be left in doubt; yea, we would be obliged to think the debt not paid, or at least not paid in full, our substitute still being held in durance. If Christ were yet in the grave we could nevermore believe that we are accounted free from all debt before God. But He is no more in the grave. When those three women came to the sepulchre they found it empty, and a heavenly messenger proclaimed to them: "*He is risen.*" That heavenly messenger could not have been there, neither could He have spoken to the women, if he had not been sent by the Father. His words were the message of God the Father to the world. Even this alone would be sufficient and conclusive proof that God the Father had accepted the ransom of the Son as payment in full for the world's debt. But besides this the Scriptures in many places declare that God raised up Christ from the dead; yea, this is ascribed particularly to the Father, the first person of the Godhead. Thus Peter says, speaking of Christ: "Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death," Acts 2, 24; and again he says: "Ye killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses." Acts 3, 15. Still more distinctly does Paul write: "Like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Rom. 6, 4. Not only of the Godhead in general, but of God the Father in particular, is it said that He raised up Jesus from the dead. Now what does God declare by this act of recalling our security man from the bonds of death into which our debt had brought Him? Why, He de-

clares that the debt is paid, and He most emphatically declares by this act that the debt of the world is paid in full; for if one single farthing had remained unpaid the just God according to His strict justice would not have dismissed Christ from the debt-prison of death.

In the resurrection of Christ we have the plain and unmistakable declaration of God the Father Himself—for He it was that raised up Christ from the dead—that the debt of the world is paid, paid in full; that there is not a single person on earth whose sins are not atoned for; that there is not a single sin for which not a full ransom has been given. By raising up Christ from the dead God the Father declared that He has no more any charges against the world, that its debt is cancelled, that He has received that which was due Him. Hence we are to look upon the resurrection of Christ as the receipt for the payment of our debt signed and sealed by the Father, as the declaration of our Creditor Himself that He has received payment and is satisfied. By raising up Christ from the dead God the Father, as it were, proclaims to all the world: Give ear and hear, ye dwellers on the earth! Ye owed me ten thousand talents, and because ye were not able to pay I made your bondsman, Mine only begotten Son, pay in your stead. See, now, how gloriously I bring Him forth from the tomb, and know thereby that He has paid the debt. This is the Easter message: the resurrection of Christ is the receipt of the Father that He has received payment to His satisfaction.

That this is the meaning of Christ's resurrection is certainly very clear, and Scripture testifies to it in plain words. Thus the prophet Isaiah in the 53d chapter says: "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." It was God who laid on or reckoned to Him the sins of all. Again the prophet says: "It pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief." It was God who punished in Christ the sins which He had laid on Him; for "he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him: and with his stripes we are healed." God laid on Christ and punished in Him the sins of man in order that

man might have peace, and now that God raises Him up so gloriously from the dead what does, what can it mean, but that the punishment of sin is ended, that by God there is no more any punishment held in reserve for man. By this act God declared that He is at peace with man, wherefore Paul says: "Christ was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification." Rom. 4, 25. In the resurrection of Christ we are declared free, free from sin, its curse and its punishment.

The ban is broken, we are free!
Our help is ever, Lord, in Thee,
The Victor over Satan.

A beautiful illustration of this the Lord gave when, after His resurrection He spake of the disciples as His brethren, saying to Mary Magdalene: "Go to my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God and your God." John 21, 17. Why is it that He now pronounces them His brethren, and calls His Father their Father, and His God their God? He does so, because by His resurrection it is made manifest that sin, that which separated God and man, is removed. For this His resurrection is undeniable and unmistakable proof. In the resurrection of Christ we are declared free from sin, guilt and wrath, in it we are pronounced sons and daughters of God.

II.

I have attempted to say a little on what the words mean: "*He is risen.*" I know it is only stammering and not speaking. To portray it fully and worthily is beyond my ability. Allow me a few words only on appropriating the fruit of Christ's resurrection unto ourselves, on reaping the benefits thereof. What great thing must we do to bring the fruits of His rising again from the dead into our possession? What can we do? Nothing. What I have told you is historic fact which transpired eighteen and one-half centuries ago. How can historical facts be appropriated? Only and alone by believing them, by receiving them as facts. There is no other way; and though

we would cut ourselves with knives and burn our bodies, that could not change history. That God raised up Christ from the dead and thereby declared that the guilt of man is atoned for and, hence, that the punishment of sin, having once been suffered, shall be inflicted no more, is a finished fact which no works or doings of ours can alter. We are to believe it, we are to depend upon it; this is to be our trust, our hope, our confidence that in Christ Jesus we are free from sin and it shall be reckoned unto us no more to all eternity. When a king proclaims amnesty to rebellious subjects what else have they to do to possess the advantages of that amnesty than to believe it.

Ah yes! to believe it, that is the difficulty with men. Reason has so many objections to offer. It will ask: How is sin removed? Is it not still in the world? How can God be reconciled to the world? Are not the majority of men still under judgment and sink down to perdition? True, sin is yet in the world, but by raising up Christ God did not declare that sin should be banished from the earth, He declared that it is atoned for. Many still go down to destruction, but that is no proof that God did not proclaim a general amnesty to all, it is only a proof that these despise the amnesty and "bring upon themselves swift destruction," but those who do accept it are the heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; for "he that believeth on him is not condemned." John 3, 18.

Do not stop long to ask: What must we, we on our part, do to be justified from sin? I tell you, that Jesus Christ did die in your sins to make atonement for them, and God raised Him up again and by this act declared that He did make atonement for your sins and, hence, that your sins shall no more be accounted unto you, but that you shall go free. I am today not preaching to you the law of Moses, but the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and I have nothing to ask of you, neither works, nor sacrifices. All works necessary to be done Christ has done long ago, and by raising Him again God the Father declared and testified that He has accepted the work of our substitute. It is all finished. There is a highway to heaven; a plain way, a

safe way, a way free to every child of Adam, a way on which no toll is asked. Jesus Christ is the way. For this the empty sepulchre in Joseph's garden is evidence; for He that had lain there is raised again for our justification and He, now sitting on the throne of the Father, declares: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto Him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely." Be ye believing, and not unbelieving. Amen.

EASTER.

SECOND SERMON.

TEXT: And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of a honey-comb, And he took it, and did eat before them. And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. Luke 24, 36-47.

“The Lord is risen;” “He is risen indeed,” this was the word which went from mouth to mouth in Jerusalem on the morning of the third day after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and wherever this word went it created wonder and astonishment. Those days had been days full of the most marvelous events. Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth, who had raised up Lazarus from the dead, had been going in and out, and vast multitudes gathered in the temple to hear Him. But the elders, the chief priests and the Pharisees hated Him because He preached repentance, and because so many followed Him. Suddenly Jesus was apprehended in the darkness of the night and was brought before the high council, and the next morning the news spread over the city that He was sentenced to death for blasphemy, because He had confessed Himself the Son of God. Now His friends were intimidated and His

enemies became extremely bold. In the early morning He was conducted through the streets by a noisy multitude, and by clamors and threats they prevailed on the Roman governor to sentence Jesus to the shameful death of crucifixion. At noon a darkness set in the like of which had never been known in the annals of man and at the end of the darkness an earthquake occurred which shook the city, rent the rocks and laid open the tombs of many of the sleeping saints. When these disturbances of nature were over the day ended like other days, and the body of Jesus was gently laid in the sepulchre.

On the following day another strange and unusual scene was witnessed. The chief of the priests and Pharisees were seen going to Pilate, and then out to Joseph's garden to seal the sepulchre and to set a watch. Must not many have wondered greatly, seeing those holy men break the Sabbath so flagrantly?

But the most wonderful of all was yet to come. Early the next morning when the light began to shine from the east another great earthquake occurred. The rock rolled from the door of the sepulchre, and an angel whose countenance shone like lightning and whose raiment was white as snow sat upon it. At the sight of the angel the keepers fainted from fear, and when they recovered they fled to the city and were seen entering the palace of the high priest. Soon they came out again and went to their barracks, and when asked about their night's watch they said, His disciples had come and had stolen the body of Jesus while they slept. A fine story indeed for Roman soldiers to tell on themselves that they had slept at their post of duty! Did they not know if this story would reach the ears of the governor it might cost them their heads? They knew it well, but their well filled pockets betrayed a secret.

In the mean time women came to the disciples, bringing the news: "He is risen," but they found no faith. Yet Peter and John ran to the sepulchre and found it empty, and the report was repeated over and again, until it could no more be discredited. What does it mean that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead? When the disciples were obliged to believe it by the testimony of their own senses they did still not understand

the meaning of it, until the Lord Himself opened their understanding. In a wonderfully short summary does St. Paul comprise the whole meaning, when he writes: "Christ was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." The same who died to make atonement for sin is risen again, bringing righteousness, life and immortality out of the grave, not for Himself, but for us and for all that believe in His name. To kindle in our hearts the right Easter joy let us meditate on

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST THE IMMUTABLE FOUNDATION OF OUR FAITH AND SALVATION, remembering

- I. The certainty of His resurrection; and
- II. The certainty of our salvation.

I.

Never were the disciples slower to believe than when the message of the Lord's resurrection came to them. They ought to have been prepared for this message, because the Lord had told them, the third day He would rise again, but they had not understood Him. They perhaps thought that His words must not be taken in a literal meaning, and so the news brought by those women was a surprise to them. Yet on that first day the Lord appeared so often, at so many places and to so many different persons that they began to be convinced, it must be so, and in the evening they greeted those disciples returning from Emmaus with the words: "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon." Nevertheless faith and unbelief were yet struggling within them, and when Jesus, while the doors were locked, suddenly stood among them and said: "*Peace be unto you,*" "*they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit.*"

That such thoughts came to the minds of the disciples is not surprising; for Jesus now acted and behaved very differently than He did formerly. They were accustomed to see Him walk and behave like other men, but now He appeared and

disappeared, He was seen now at one, then at another place, and at last He even came to them through locked doors. Could this be their Master who had been bound with bonds and was transfixed to the cross? He had entered on a very different state, quite another mode of existence, and this He distinctly told the disciples, saying: "*These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you.*" He was now with them and was speaking to them, but He was no more with them after the manner of man with man. He was now in a glorified state and His body had obtained very different qualities than it had before. No man can say that Jesus only appeared to be dead and on the morning of the third day He revived again. In that case He would have returned into this earthly and physical life, but He arose from the sepulchre to enter another and an altogether different life.

To convince the disciples that they were not seeing the apparition of a ghost the Lord showed them His hands and His feet and said: "*Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.*" They saw the nailprints in His hands and feet, and the scar in His side which the spear had penetrated. They handled Him and found Him composed of flesh and bone. This could not be a spirit; for a spirit can assume the semblance of a body, but never a true and real body. And yet further to convince the disciples He asked them: "*Have ye here any meat?*" and He ate before them. They could doubt no longer. This was not a spirit, it was a man. It was the same man who had been their teacher for three years, who was crucified and was laid in the tomb. He was alive again; He walked, He ate, He spake. Here was a dead man returned into life, yet not into this earthly life. He had entered into another life, another mode of existence. He had the same body composed of the same flesh and bones, but it had obtained very different qualities. With His glorified body He appeared and vanished; with it He passed through locked doors; with it He went through solid walls as through

thin air. What could hinder Him from being in His Supper with His body and blood? Why should we doubt His being invisibly with us every day according to His promise: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Matt. 28, 20. Be a John and not a Thomas; be believing and not unbelieving.

When Jesus had proved His identity to the disciples He proceeded to create divine certainty of His resurrection in them. But divine certainty is not obtained by the observations of the senses. The faith or conviction which is obtained by sight and feeling is human certainty, and therefore not infallible. If the Lord had done nothing more than to convince the disciples of His identity by their sight and feeling, then they might thereafter very easily have fallen into doubt, thinking their senses might have deceived them. Therefore to create in their hearts divine and infallible certainty which can in no way deceive, Jesus led the disciples back to the Scriptures and said: "*These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.*" He reminded them of the prophecies concerning His suffering and resurrection, that His hands and His feet would be digged through, that His garments would be parted and lots would be cast over His vesture, that He would be cut off out of the land of the living; but that the Lord would not suffer His Holy One to see corruption, and that He would be taken from prison and from judgment. From the Scriptures Jesus showed the disciples that He was to suffer and die to make atonement for sin, and was to rise again; for He said: "*Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day.*" After Christ had been put to death and buried according to the Scriptures it was self-evident that He must also rise again according to the Scriptures. So it was written and so it had to be, because the Scriptures cannot be broken. The disciples ought to have known this and ought to have been looking for His resurrection, but their eyes were held, until the Lord "*opened their understanding, that*

they might understand the Scriptures." Now the disciples did no more believe only because they saw Him with their eyes and touched Him with their hands, but because it was written that He must rise again. Now their faith stood upon a rock which could not give way; for the Word which had proceeded from the mouth of the Lord could not fail.

Study the Scriptures. They bear their own testimony of themselves, and their testimony is sufficient unto us. Yet while studying the Scriptures we should also not forget, that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is such a fact of history which affords ample facilities for the most critical investigation. It did not take place in a remote quarter of the globe, but at Jerusalem, one of the most renowned cities of antiquity and situated almost in the very centre of the civilized world. Neither were the things which occurred in those days done in secret and obscurity. The trial of Jesus was as public as it possibly could be. It occurred just at Easter, when the city was crowded with people from all parts of the known world and His crucifixion took place right at one of the main thoroughfares of a most populous country. After His resurrection He indeed appeared only to His disciples, but everybody at Jerusalem knew it to be a fact. The high priests feared that He would rise again, or they would not have set a watch. The guards were witnesses of what had transpired, and though they said that the body of Jesus had been stolen by the disciples, yet neither they nor the chief priests made a move to recover it. If a corpse would be stolen from our cemetery and we would know who committed the theft, would we not at once employ the officers of the law to have those thieves arrested and to compel them to return the corpse? The disciples were defenceless men. Why then did those Roman soldiers who said the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus, not force them to surrender it again? O! the body of Jesus, composed of flesh and bone, was truly with the disciples that evening, but not because they had carried Him away.

Neither did the resurrection of Jesus Christ take place in an obscure age when ignorance and superstition ruled. Excepting our own, that was the most enlightened age which the

world has known since the days of Noah. About that time the civilization of antiquity was at its height. Books were plenty and learning was widespread. In short, the resurrection of Jesus Christ occurred at such a place, at such a time and in such a manner that there is no possibility of denying it. The more men have attempted to disprove it, the more has the evidence for it been strengthened. It is an immutable fact: The Lord is risen; He is risen indeed.

What is the fruit of Christ's resurrection? It demonstrates that there is a state of bliss for man to enter after death.

II.

From Christ's resurrection we derive this positive knowledge that there is another life after this earthly life, another mode of existence, into which not only the soul, a spirit, will enter, but the body of man will rise again and will also enter into that other mode of existence. As Christ had the same body, so we too shall have the same bodies, but they will have other qualities. Of this St. Paul writes: "It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body." 1 Cor. 15, 42. Here the body must have a solid substratum on which to rest its weight, but in the resurrection the saints of God "shall be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." To the Philippians, 3, 21, the same apostle writes: "Jesus Christ shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body." This body must decay, but it will rise again and will be so changed as to be fitted for that other mode of existence, the life in the new heaven and the new earth.

In that other mode of existence there are two conditions: a condition of happiness and a condition of misery. When man lent his ear to the voice of the Old Serpent and sinned against God, he was sentenced to die and to enter that state of misery, but for this purpose did Jesus Christ come into the world that He might open a way for man to enter the state of happiness, and He accomplished His mission; for He Himself arose from

the dead and entered that glorious state. And He entered into glory not actually for His sake, but rather to open the way for us that we too might enter there. To this He bare testimony both before and after His resurrection. Coming to the disciples He said: "*Peace be unto you,*" which is saying: I have now made peace for you. The Father is reconciled and there are mansions of peace for you in His house; and though you must die bodily, yet you shall no more enter that unhappy state of torment and misery, but you shall come to the habitations of peace where I am. There is a haven of peace, a rest in store for man, and into it all those shall enter who hold to this Jesus Christ; for He is risen from the dead and is entered into that glorious estate, and He has said: "Where I am, there shall also my servant be." John 12, 26.

Because He has made peace with God the resurrection of Jesus Christ brings the assurance of the forgiveness of sin: for He connects both when He says: "*Thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*" By the resurrection of Christ we are certified that there is a remission of sin, because it proves that full atonement has been made for the world's sin. Footing on His resurrection we can cheerfully come before the court of heaven, and can say unto the Father: Thy Son became surety for my sins and He died in them. Him hast Thou raised from the dead, and hast thereby declared that Thou art reconciled unto me. For His sake Thou wilt forgive me my sins. Since Christ is risen we know for a certainty that the gate of paradise is opened wide for sinners to return and to rest again under the tree of life. Therefore Peter proved his Pentecost sermon with the simple words: "This Jesus hath God raised up," and he added: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." Acts 2, 36. Throughout the book of Acts you will find that the apostles proved the remission of sin and the truth of their message by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Because our Surety, is

raised again and is seated on the right hand of Majesty it is certain that there is forgiveness of sin.

The preaching of this glad tidings, forgiveness for sinners, is the fruit of Christ's resurrection. Without it there would be no remission of sin, no preaching of the Gospel, no Christian church. The nations would sit in darkness and the world would be without hope. Even if Christ had done all other things that are written of Him, but had not risen from the dead we could not hope in Him, because it must then be said that He had not kept His promise. But now, since He is risen from the dead, we must conclude and say that all His promises are and must be divine, unalterable truth. And He can do what He promised. What could be impossible to Him who could take His life again after He had laid it down? And this is the promise which He has left us: "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am, there ye may be also." John 14, 3.

The signs are multiplying that He will soon come to fulfill this promise. It admits of no controversy that His words have been fulfilled, that repentance and remission of sins should be preached among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. At Jerusalem the preaching of the Gospel began and it spread farther and farther until it has come also to this Valley. What is it that I preach unto you other than the forgiveness of your sins in Jesus Christ who is risen from the dead? Let my words enter into your ears. Believe it that in Jesus Christ you have the forgiveness of the Father, and go then and show yourselves grateful for the Easter message in that you purge out the old leaven of sin and do "not henceforth live unto yourselves, but unto him which died for you and rose again."

Christians draw away your heart

Now from pleasure base and hollow:

Would ye there with Christ have part,

Here His rising ye must follow;

Fix your hearts beyond the skies,

Whither ye yourselves would rise. Amen.

I. SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

TEXT: Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained. John 20, 19-23.

The greatest and best treasure which a man can possess upon earth is the forgiveness of sins. As sin is the most harmful of evils, the forgiveness of sin is the most useful of treasures. Whatever else a man may possess, without the forgiveness of sin it is all only of subordinate and temporary value. Though a man possess all riches, the diamonds of Africa and the mines of Peru, and have not the forgiveness of sin, he will, in death, lose all that he has and will be forever poor. Though a man enjoy the highest honors which this world can give so that all men must bow unto him, and have not the forgiveness of sin, he is despised before God and the holy angels, and his part will be everlasting shame and contempt. Though a man possess all learning and all knowledge and could tell all the secrets and powers of nature, and would not know how to obtain the forgiveness of sin, all his knowledge would at last help him nothing, because he lacks that knowledge by which alone everlasting life and salvation is obtained. Without the forgiveness of sin there can be no communion with God; for the prophet says: "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." Is. 59, 2. Where there is not the forgiveness of sin there can be nothing but wrath, death and destruction; for "the wages of sin is death." But where there is the forgiveness of sin there is all blessedness, as the 32d Psalm says: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the

man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity." Where there is the forgiveness of sin there is no more condemnation, but there is grace, there is righteousness, there is the victory over death, there is salvation. Indeed, of all treasures the forgiveness of sin is the greatest and best.

But it is not enough for me to know of a treasure, it must be brought into my possession, if I am to be benefited by it. If I know of a treasure, but I am not in possession of it and do not know how to obtain it, it is only the worse for me, because I am then situated like the rich man in torments, who could see Lazarus enjoying the glories of heaven and himself was debarred from them. The man who would tell me of a treasure and would not also show me ways and means how to obtain it, would only be tantalizing me, and would not be doing me a favor.

Has God provided ways and means for us sinful mortals to come into the possession of this heavenly treasure, the forgiveness of sins? Most assuredly has God provided such ways and means. Jesus Christ did not take the forgiveness of sin which He had earned with bitter pains and a bloody death away from the earth to store it up in the granaries of heaven, where it could be of no benefit to man on this nether earth, as Paul writes, Romans 10th chapter: "The righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is to bring Christ down from above.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach: that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Jesus Christ left the forgiveness of sins upon earth where He earned it and where it is needed, and He provided all the ways and means necessary for its distribution among men. This provision He made by instituting the ministration of the Gospel, which is essentially nothing else than bringing the forgiveness of sins unto men. The institution of this office is recorded in the text before us. Hence indulge me to-day in a few words on:

ABSOLUTION, OR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, stating

- I. What absolution is;
- II. Why it is so necessary to retain it; and
- III. How it should be applied in practice.

I.

Absolution, as practiced in our Evangelical Lutheran church, is regarded with suspicion by many, and frequently it is a stumbling block also to such who are called Lutherans, because they do not know what it is. To them the pronouncing of absolution is, and must be, offensive rather than edifying and comforting; for as long as a person does not understand, how it comes that the church through its minister can pronounce absolution, he cannot obtain the right benefit of it. We should therefore carefully study this text that we may understand, why and how it is that there is power on earth to remit and to retain sins.

What is absolution? We may speak of absolution in a general way as comprising all the means of grace, as virtually it indeed does. In this way Luther speaks of absolution when he says:

“Preaching the forgiveness of sin is nothing else than to absolve or to pronounce loose from sin. This is also done in baptism and the sacrament, which are likewise ordained to exhibit this forgiveness of sin and to certify of it. To be baptized or to receive the sacrament is also absolution, because in these forgiveness is promised and announced to each one individually in the name and by the command of Christ. This hear as often as thou art in need, and receive and believe it, as heard of Christ Himself. For because it is not our absolution, but Christ’s command and word, therefore it is just as good and just as valid, as if heard out of His own mouth.”

When we baptize a child we absolve it from sin. When we preach the Gospel we preach the forgiveness of sin. Absolution is in all the Gospel ordinances.

Speaking of absolution in the ordinary way, we may call it the formal announcing of the remission of sin, and it is most essentially performing the office of Christ unto which He was

sent by the Father. Coming to the disciples He said: "*Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.*" He commissioned the disciples to go and to perform His office. Yet not of His whole office was He here speaking. He was sent both to earn forgiveness for man and to bring forgiveness to men. He was sent to give Himself a ransom for all, to atone for sin and so to earn forgiveness for men. Of this part of His office He is here not speaking. Neither the apostles nor any one else did He ever send to bring a sacrifice for sin. Jesus Christ Himself alone perfected the work of redemption, as He says by the prophet: "I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me." Is. 63, 3. By His sacrifice all sins are atoned for, and there is no more any sacrifice for sin necessary.

But Christ was not only sent to pay down the ransom by which the forgiveness of sin is purchased, He was also sent actually to forgive sins, and this part of His office He exercised in general whenever He preached the Gospel of the kingdom of God, and in particular by forgiving the sins of individual persons, as when He said to that man sick of the palsy: "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee." Matt. 9, 2. Of this part of His office the Lord is here speaking; for after He had paid the wages of sin and returned to the disciples from the grave He said: "*Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.*" He Himself brought the disciples the peace which He had earned and He commissioned them to go and to bring it to others. For what He sends them He expresses in still more clear and unmistakable words; for the text goes on: "*And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.*"

True to this commission the apostles went forth, preaching repentance and the remission of sins among all nations. And we have very clear examples which show that they did not only preach the Gospel in common to all, but also announced the forgiveness of their sins to individual persons. Thus St. Paul

writes: "If I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ." 2 Cor. 2, 10. At Corinth Paul, as the minister of the church and in the stead of Christ, forgave the sins of particular individuals. This is clearly a description of absolution as it is practiced in our church unto this day.

This power to remit sins was not given to the apostles only; for then there would be no more forgiveness on earth since their death. To whom this power is given is plainly indicated in our text. The Lord "*breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them.*" He first gives them the Holy Ghost, and then declares that they have power to forgive sins. So the apostles had this power not because they were the Lord's chosen witnesses, nor because they were inspired men, but because they had the Holy Ghost. Those that have the Holy Ghost, all believing souls, the whole church has the power and command to remit sins, and this its office each local church performs by calling and ordaining ministers publicly in its midst to preach the Word of reconciliation and to pronounce absolution.

But because absolution is so frequently a stumbling block to people, let me mention a few of the objections which are commonly advanced.

The most common objection is that God alone can forgive sins, and it is called bigotry to believe that preachers can forgive sin. Now it is self-evident, by His own authority God alone can forgive sin, but can He not also delegate this power to others? To deny this would be denying His sovereignty. The only question is: Did God give this power to men? The Lord answers: "*Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them,*" and unto Peter He said: "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Matt. 16, 19.

Could Peter forgive sins? Was he not himself a sinner? Can one man forgive the sins of another? It is manifest that Peter, as a man, could not do this; for of himself and by his own authority no man can forgive sins. The power was not vested

in the persons of the apostles, but in the commission of the Lord. The Lord committed unto them the Word of forgiveness and by that Word they forgave sins. When the governor of our commonwealth issues a pardon and sends it by a messenger it is rightly and properly said that the messenger brings liberty to the prisoner, but the pardon itself is not of the messenger, it is of the governor and is vested in the message of pardon. The power to forgive sin was not of Peter, but of the Lord, and the forgiveness was not Peter's forgiveness, it was the Lord's forgiveness.

Another erroneous idea is that absolution is not real forgiveness, but only a form of announcing that there is forgiveness. Were this so then the Lord must have said: To whomsoever ye announce remission to them it is announced. To interpret the text in this way results in perverting it to senseless talk. The church, in absolution, really, actually, effectually forgives sins; for clear and strong are the words of the Lord: "*Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them.*" When the church forgives sins they are forgiven. Not only do these words say it as distinctly as words can say it, it is also evident from the mission of Christ. He was not sent only to make announcement that there is forgiveness, but to forgive sins, as He also really and actually did forgive sin. Now as He was sent, so He sends His disciples. To say that the church can not really forgive sin would be saying that Christ could not really forgive sin. The words of absolution do really and actually contain, convey and give what they say, the forgiveness of sin.

Two other things there are which to some might appear to render absolution invalid and void: the hypocrisy of the preacher who pronounces, and the unbelief of him to whom absolution is pronounced. If a preacher is a hypocrite will that render the absolution which he pronounces invalid, seeing that only those have the power of the keys who have the Holy Ghost? Here we must remember that a preacher does not pronounce absolution by virtue of his personally possessing the grace of God, but by virtue of his call. As the servant of the church he performs the office of the church, and that is always valid and effectual, let

the preacher be pious or impious. A preacher who is a hypocrite is, of course, a castaway; but the validity of absolution is not dependent on the preacher's personal piety or impiety, it is the Word of Christ, and that is always true. Man's hypocrisy does not and can not make it void.

But will not the unbelief of him to whom it is pronounced make the absolution unreal and ineffectual? Because the unbeliever does not possess the forgiveness one might very aptly think that his sins were not really and actually forgiven in absolution. This idea is owing to a mistake in thinking. From your not possessing a thing it does not follow that I have not really and actually given it to you. I may really and actually have given you a gold piece, and you may still not be in possession of it, because you may have thrown it away, or dropped it, or lost it. If an unbeliever is absolved, he is truly absolved on the part of God; for in our text the Lord does not except hypocrites, but says: "*Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them.*" In absolution the sins of the unbeliever have been remitted unto him, although he does not possess and enjoy the forgiveness. The relation between the unbeliever and absolution is this: he is released, but he is not loose; he is freed, but he is not free. Such a person is like unto a prisoner whose cell is thrown open and who is pronounced a free man, but who nevertheless remains in his cell. That man is freed, and that is a reality; yet he is not free, because he makes no use of his liberty, but his remaining in his cell can not make his liberation untrue, or unreal. Just so with the unbeliever. In absolution he is really and truly released from sin, and the fact that he does not use his liberty, but remains in his sins does not make the remission unreal. Therefore I say, he is freed, but he is not free; he is loosed, but he is not loose; and that he is not loose is not because he had not been loosed, but because he declines to be loose.

Behold, what a glorious thing absolution is. Shall it be retained in the church? Of the many reasons, why absolution can not be dropped in order to please men, but must be retained, let me mention only a few.

II.

Absolution is taught and commanded in the Scriptures plain as plain can be. There are no plainer words in the Bible than these: "*Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them.*" Equally clear are other passages. If any thing is taught in the Bible with direct, plain and unmistakable words it is absolution. To drop absolution is to drop a part of the Bible teaching.

Moreover, with the doctrine of absolution must stand or fall the right and true doctrine of the Word of the Gospel as a means of grace. The formula of absolution is nothing else than the Gospel comprised in a short summary. To say that the Word of absolution does not bring forgiveness, is the same as saying that the Word of the Gospel does not bring forgiveness. But just here is the trouble with many. They do not believe that the Word brings grace and forgiveness. Many regard the Word of the Gospel nothing more than a mere proclamation which does not bring the thing itself, but only makes known that there is grace and forgiveness, and outside of, or separate from that Word people must then see, how to get forgiveness. That is regarding the Word of Christ an empty word which brings nothing. It is virtually making the Word of the Gospel a human word. So it is with a man's word of promise. If a friend promises you ten dollars that word does not yet convey the money to you. But God's Word contains and brings what it expresses; it effects what it says. When God said: "Let there be light," that word itself produced the light. When Christ called into the sepulchre of Lazarus: "Come forth," we must not think that outside of this word He employed other means to bring Lazarus out. When Christ said to that sick man: "Thy sins be forgiven thee," that man needed not to look around for ways and means to procure forgiveness; for that word brought him forgiveness. Christ's Word is not an empty word, it brings the thing itself. The Lord distinctly asserts this when saying, "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations." Luke 24, 47. The preaching in His name brings and effects the remission of sins.

Therefore Paul calls the Gospel "the power of God unto salvation" and writes: "He hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation." 2 Cor. 5, 19. It is a word of reconciliation, because it brings reconciliation, making men reconciled to God. When a man has once come to this faith that the Word of the Gospel is a divine Word which contains and gives what it expresses, he finds no difficulty in believing that in absolution sin is really and truly forgiven; for this is the very substance of the Gospel that to penitent sinners who believe in Christ their sins shall be forgiven. But so long as men regard the Word of the Gospel like a human word they can see nothing in it, and it appears to them like superstition to believe that the Word of absolution brings the forgiveness of sin. But if we would surrender this doctrine, what foundation would be left us to stand on? Nothing but uncertain feelings, or experiences. But here we can say: This is the Lord's Word; it does what it says; therefore it must be truly so and can not be otherwise, my sins are forgiven.

This brings us

III.

to the practical application of absolution.

From the words of this text it is very clear that absolution is either to be granted or refused, as the case may be. "*Whose soever sins ye remit; whose soever sins ye retain.*" Some are to be absolved; to some sin is to be retained. Can a minister do in this as he pleases? No indeed. The office of the keys is not the minister's, it is Christ's. The minister is only the steward and the steward is bound down to the instructions of his Master. It is with absolution as with the Lord's supper. If the communion table were mine, then I could do with it what I pleased, and could invite whom I pleased, but because it is the Lord's table I must administer it according to the Lord's instructions and can not do about it as I please. In absolution a minister is bound down to this rule: To the penitent sin is to be forgiven, to the impenitent it is to be retained. To this rule a minister is pledged, and it is his sacred duty to carry it out without any respect of person. God forgives the penitent and does not for-

give the impenitent. If therefore a minister refuses absolution to a penitent, and pronounces absolution to an impenitent sinner, both is abomination before God. As he can not see into the heart a minister is easily deceived by hypocrites, but any minister who will knowingly absolve a manifestly impenitent sinner abuses his office and will be found guilty of justifying the wicked. But to a penitent sinner, no matter what he has been guilty of, absolution must never be denied.

By those to whom absolution is pronounced it is to be received in faith without doubting. Consider the words what they are: "I, a called minister of the Gospel, in the name of Christ, announce to you who repent and believe in Christ, the forgiveness of all your sins." Is it a fact that to the penitent and believing their sins are forgiven? If that is not a fact then we must lay away the Bible as a delusive book; for this is the teaching of the whole New Testament that those who repent of sin and believe in Christ shall have the forgiveness of sin. When the minister says: To you who repent and believe sin is forgiven, that is simply saying what the whole Gospel says, and these words are spoken in a formal and solemn manner for the reassurance and strengthening of the penitent.

This too is a reason, why absolution must be retained, because it affords unspeakable comfort to a troubled heart. It is true, we Christians have the assurance of forgiveness already in our baptism, in the general preaching of the Gospel and in the Lord's supper; but that does by no means make absolution superfluous. As many of us as stand in the faith, as many as are battling against flesh and blood, know how sadly we need ever again to be assured that God is gracious and sin is forgiven. Now here is absolution in which the called minister, in the name of God, pronounces the forgiveness of sin, and of His stewards, as servants of the church, the Lord declares: "*Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them.*" As often, therefore, as absolution is pronounced unto us, we should believe and in no way doubt, that our sins are forgiven before God in heaven. Amen.

II. SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

TEXT: I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is a hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth; and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is a hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. John 10, 11-16.

The connection of our Lord Jesus Christ with His church upon earth is a very intimate one. Of His union with the believers He speaks much in His prayer for the church, in which He addresses the Father: "The glory which thou gavest me, I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one." John 17, 22. The believing soul is one with Christ, as also St. Paul writes: "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." 1 Cor. 6, 17. This union of the believing soul with Christ is something spiritual and, therefore, incomprehensible to him who is yet carnal. Even the believer himself will comprehend it fully only in the life to come. But to make it intelligible to us, as far as it is possible in this life, how closely the Lord is united to His church, the Holy Ghost uses manifold comparisons in the Scriptures. So the Scriptures represent Christ as the Bridegroom and the church His bride. This beautiful comparison is pictured masterly in the Song of Solomon, and by the prophet Hosea 2, 19, the Lord says unto the church: "I will betroth thee unto me forever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving kindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me

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in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord." The church is the Lord's chosen one whom He has betrothed unto Himself for time and eternity, and the believing soul has so wholly rendered itself unto Him that it says: "My beloved is mine, and I am his." Again, Christ is called the head, the church His body, as Paul writes, Eph. 5, 23: "Christ is the head of the church; and he is the savior of the body." The head gives life to the body and governs it, and without the head the body is dead. Jesus Christ is the life of His people. He lives in them and they in Him, and He is ever with them to guide and protect them, as He addresses His own by the prophet, saying: "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." Is. 41, 10.

Another example the Lord takes from the grapevine, saying to the disciples: "I am the vine, ye are the branches." John 15, 5. The vine is all to the branches. It supports them and replenishes them with sap to grow and to bring fruit. Christ is all in all to the believing soul, nourishing it with heavenly bread, and refreshing it with living water that it rejoices in Him and brings fruit pleasing to the angels and beneficial to men. Of such lovely comparisons we find many more in the Scriptures, and they are written that we should not imagine some partition wall between us and the Lord, some barrier difficult to surmount, but that with all cheerfulness and confidence we should draw nigh unto Him as a bride to her groom; that we should resign ourselves to be guided and governed by Him like a member by its head; that we should hope and expect all from Him like a branch from the vine. Such a lovely comparison is also contained in this text. In accordance with it let us meditate on:

THE GOOD SHEPHERD AND HIS FLOCK, remembering

- I. The Shepherd's goodness;
- II. The flock's trustfulness.

I.

1204

The occupation of shepherds is one of the oldest in the world. Abel, the second son of Adam, was a shepherd, and some of the greatest heroes of faith were shepherds, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David. That the patriarchs were nomadic shepherds was not something accidental. They were to wander from place to place, from country to country, in order that the knowledge of the promise given unto them might be spread far and wide, and that they might be a figure of the promised spiritual Shepherd. They were keepers of sheep to prefigure Him who is the Keeper of our souls. When this promised Keeper of our souls had come He very frequently called Himself, or compared Himself with a shepherd, as we find in many passages of the New Testament. He is the one true Shepherd who cares far more for the soul, than the most faithful shepherd can for his flock. He is in deed and in truth what He calls Himself in our text "*the good shepherd*," to whom we can cheerfully and confidently entrust our souls.

Already by the mouth of the prophets did God call Him a shepherd. Thus He said by Ezekiel: "I will set up one Shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd." Ez. 34, 23. By Isaiah He said: "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." Is. 40, 11. David sang of Him: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." This good Shepherd of whom the prophets spake, to whom David trusted so confidently and of whom he sang so rejoicingly is none other than Jesus of Nazareth, whom the Father sent into the world when the appointed time was come; for in the chapter before us He says unto the Jews: "Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest?"

He is the shepherd who was promised of old and was sent by the Father. Hence we may not doubt His word when He here says: "*I am the good shepherd*." An evil shepherd the

God of love could not have promised to the fathers; an unfaithful shepherd the God of mercy and truth could not have sent into the world. He that was promised of old and sent by the Father can not lie. He speaks the truth when He says: "*I am the good shepherd.*" The facts demonstrate that His words are not vain boasting. What He says He has proved by His deeds long ago. Indisputably has He evidenced that He is not a hireling: "*The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth; and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.*"

Here the Lord points out the difference between a good shepherd and a hireling. By hirelings we must not understand false prophets. False prophets are generally also hirelings, yet properly speaking false prophets are only such as preach false doctrine. Hirelings are those who care more for the hire than the flock, although they may perhaps preach the true doctrine. The good shepherd looks to the flock, the hireling to the hire. A good shepherd regards the flock a most precious treasure entrusted to his care, for which he will be held accountable, if any one is lost by his fault. Therefore the true welfare of the flock is his foremost care, and his own personal well being is to him a matter of secondary importance. He is ready to sacrifice worldly gain, personal ease, name and fame, yea, if need be, life itself in providing for the flock. But the hireling regards the flock rather as a means to gain his own personal ends. Not the flock's good, his own gain is his solicitude. If he gets his hire, if he can obtain what he desires he cares little or nothing for the flock, and because he cares more for himself than for the flock, therefore when he sees the wolf coming he does not face him to defend the flock, but flees. This fleeing of the hireling is not only a bodily fleeing, when he, in times of danger, deserts his flock to secure his own safety; it is chiefly a spiritual fleeing, when he avoids attacking fashionable errors, or rebuking prevalent vices, because it would render him unpopular and would

impair his personal gain. Isaiah thus graphically describes hirelings: "They are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter." Chap. 56, 10. The good shepherd seeks the honor of the Lord and the welfare of the flock; the hireling seeks his own honor and his own gain.

From this it is very plain that our Lord Jesus Christ is not a hireling, but in deed and in truth a good shepherd. He did not seek His own honor and ease, or He would have remained on the throne of glory in the bosom of the Father. He longed for the souls of men, therefore He humbled Himself and was born lowly in a stable, a helpless infant. He did not dread the fangs of the wolf, but taught the way of God in truth, fearlessly opposing the wise and the powerful of the people. He did not flee when danger approached, but readily stretched forth His own hands to be bound that the disciples might go free. He spared not His own life, He cheerfully laid it down for the flock. Were He not a good shepherd, the Jews would not have taken Him captive, the cursed tree would not have carried Him, the grave would not have received Him. Yea surely, Christ and He alone is the One good shepherd; for besides Him none other ever undertook the warfare against the enemies of our souls, none other laid down his life for us, none other can lead us to the evergreen pastures of eternal salvation. He is the shepherd who purchased and won His flock, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood, and with His innocent suffering and death, in order that it might be His own; and He has done what He here promised: "*And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.*" He sent forth His messengers to call those afar off from the east and from the west, and has made out of Jews and Gentiles one flock of Christians, as He yet does unto this present day.

Not only by delivering His flock from the power of the ene-

mies and gathering it unto Himself does Christ prove that He is the good shepherd, He in particular proves His love and His faithfulness in providing and caring for those which belong to Him. Read this whole chapter and you must surely see, how lovingly and faithfully He treats every single one of His flock. One peculiar evidence of His loving kindness towards His own is comprised in our text. He says: "*I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father.*"

A shepherd marks his sheep to know them: Christ marks His own with the seal of the Holy Ghost and the mark of the cross. He knows His own, not externally only, but also internally; for He knows them as He is known of the Father. Now the Father so knows the Son that about and in Him there is nothing hidden from the Father's knowledge. So Christ knows His own. He sees their weaknesses, He knows their wants, He is acquainted with their sicknesses, their secret longings and their hidden desires are patent before Him. He need not be told of their ailings, He knows them perfectly; for "the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his." 2 Tim. 2, 19. The tears which water your pillow in the darkness of the night, the good shepherd counts them all; the sighs which are pressed from your heart by the anguish of your soul, not one of them escapes His ear; hidden grief, secret distress which you dare not disclose to any living soul on earth, the good shepherd sees it gnawing at your heart. Shepherds of this world know their sheep only externally, internal injuries and diseases their eye can not reach; but this shepherd has eyes like flames of fire. He sees the frailties of the soul, the wounds of the heart, the ailings of the spirit.

Now every faithful shepherd, when he sees a lamb sick or wounded, will not carelessly suffer it to perish, he will seek to cure it as best he may. Christ, the good shepherd, has compassion on His sheep. He knows His own and He makes Himself known unto them as their Savior and helper. He makes them to know His love, His help, His consolation, so that they learn rejoicingly to say of Him: "He maketh me to lie down in

green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul." Ps. 23. He is indeed, according to the nature of His kingdom, not a shepherd of the body only, but chiefly of the soul. Therefore He very frequently does and must do things which are bitter to the flesh, because He seeks the health and the salvation of the soul. Nevertheless you who seek in Him the shepherd of your soul, if you will call to remembrance your former days and consider how He guided you, oft loading you with a heavy burden and leading you over rough roads, yet always refreshing your heart with consolation and hope under the cross; how He preserved you in many temptations and defended you against your spiritual enemies: when pondering all this you will surely be obliged to confess that He made Himself known to you as your Savior and helper, and you will be constrained to say with David: "Thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice." Ps. 63, 7. The good shepherd makes Himself known to His own, and more they do not need than to know Him; for he that knows Christ and seeks daily to become better acquainted with Him, experiences more and more that all is vanity what the world offers, but that Christ gives sweet pasture. The more intimately Christ's own become acquainted with Him, the more do they learn wholly to resign themselves unto Him, saying in their hearts: "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." Ps. 73, 24.

II.

Having so merciful and faithful a shepherd who has delivered us from the pits in which there is no water and leads us to the green pastures of the Gospel, the duty of gratitude demands that we recognize Him as our shepherd. Indeed, if we would be members of His flock, we must conduct ourselves towards Him in a similar manner as sheep do towards their shepherd. The Lord does not compare His Christians to adders which do not hear, nor to serpents which are full of poison, nor to swine which love the mire. He compares them to sheep, because from

the disposition and the qualities of that animal we may learn how we ought to be in heart and soul. A quality of the sheep is that it quickly learns to know its shepherd's voice. Though a dozen call it from different directions it will know the voice of its shepherd, and though it catch but a glimpse of him in the distance, yet it knows him. We are to know Jesus as our Savior, and to distinguish His voice from the voice of others. "To know the love of Christ passeth knowledge," says St. Paul. Eph. 3, 19. The ancient heathen were wont to say: Learn to know thyself; but of far greater importance is it, to learn to know Jesus. If you know Jesus it is sufficient, though you should know nothing else, and if you do not know Jesus it is a vain thing, though you would possess all the wisdom of the ancients.

If you would know Jesus you must hear His voice. Let a sheep be ever so distant, so soon as it hears its shepherd's voice, it will lift its head and will incline its ear. If Jesus is to be your shepherd you must incline your ear to hear his voice. Now His voice is His Word. If you do not hear and heed His Word, you are none of His. To a sheep there is no sound so sweet as the voice of its shepherd. If you are of Christ's flock there is nothing so sweet to you as the voice of His Gospel. If you have no love and no longing for His Word, if it is an unpleasant task to you to go to the place where His voice is heard, then you are none of His. The children of the world find their greatest delight in hearing that which is of the world. Christ's flock knows nothing sweeter than His voice. Which is the case with you? Can you say: "The judgments of the Lord are sweeter than honey and the honey-comb." Ps. 19, 10. Sheep do not only listen to the voice of their shepherd, they are quick to follow his call. As soon as the shepherd's voice resounds the whole flock starts to run to him. If you would be of Christ's flock you must follow His calling, otherwise if you do listen to His Word, but will neither believe it nor live agreeably to it, you can be none of His; for of His sheep He says: "My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them

out of my hand." John 10, 27. If you do not follow His voice you deny Him to be your shepherd, and you can have no hope of eternal life; but if you do hear His voice and follow Him no one shall pluck you out of His hand; for He, your shepherd, will stand for you.

Sheep do not follow the voice of a stranger. We must not follow after every voice which we hear, as fickle hearts do; we must "try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." 1 John 4, 1. We must apply diligence to learn to distinguish the voice of Jesus from all other voices, and His voice alone we must follow. The sheep is a useful animal. It literally does what John the Baptist says: "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none." Luke 3, 11. Learn to be useful unto others. "To do good, and to communicate, forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." Heb. 13, 16. The sheep is a cleanly animal; it avoids mire wherever it can. Do likewise. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." Matt. 5, 8. The sheep is an humble animal, and at sheepfolds the entrance is low. He that would enter must stoop. "Be not highminded," or you cannot enter Christ's fold. He Himself is the door, and if you would enter by Him, you must be minded as He was; you must humble yourself, as He humbled Himself. Sheep are content with scanty pasture. Too luxuriant pasture is not wholesome for them, and is apt to cause diseases. "Having food and raiment let us be therewith content." 1 Tim. 6, 8. Crave not worldly prosperity and ease, and murmur not under the cross, but let the shepherd choose the pasture for you. Sheep, when in terror, commence to bleat. "Pray without ceasing." In distress and anguish forget not to make known your requests to the shepherd. The sheep is a gentle animal. It harms no one, and when it is injured it does not seek to retaliate. "Recompense to no man evil for evil," and if evil is done unto you, do not seek to avenge yourselves, but give place unto wrath; the shepherd will repay in due time. Sheep follow wherever their shepherd leads, be the road smooth or rough. Let yourselves be guided by the hand of the Lord according to His will, and know

that He makes all things to work together for your good and at last leads you to the proud rest of the saints above.

Let us rejoice because we have so loving and faithful a shepherd who bought us so dearly and who cares for us so diligently. To Him let us cheerfully entrust our souls, daily striving to become more intimately acquainted with Him and more like unto Him, that on the day of judgment we may be numbered among the sheep at His right hand and none may be missing there. Amen.

III. SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

TEXT: A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father. Then said some of his disciples among themselves, What is this that he saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father? They said therefore, What is this that he saith, A little while? we cannot tell what he saith. Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto them, Do ye inquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me? Verily, verily, I say unto you, that ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you. And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. John 16, 16-23.

The children of the world, who live only for this world, think it their greatest gain to live after their heart's desire, to do what the flesh lusts after. If they can have what they crave in this world, they count themselves happy, and they regard the Christians as acting foolishly in denying themselves and following Christ. If the man of the world can practice those sins and vices in which he delights; if he can obtain what he covets, he has his heaven on earth, and he cares nothing for another heaven. Given the choice, if they would rather be on earth or in heaven, the worldly-minded would not be slow to choose the earth before heaven. This is the chiefest reason, why men refuse to become Christians and to walk with Christ, because they do not want to forego the pleasures and the enjoyments of sin. They love sin and are not willing to forsake it. They do not want to crucify the flesh, they want to live in the world as it

suits them, indulging the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.

Their principle is, to enjoy life while it lasts; to make out of the world what they can. Thus Isaiah describes the mind and doings of the ungodly in the 21st chapter, saying: "Behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine: let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we shall die," and in the 56th chapter he writes: "They all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter. Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to-morrow shall be as this day and much more abundant." Even so the Lord, in the 12th chapter of Luke, introduces a man who had filled his granaries and who said unto his soul: "Thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." That is all the desire of the world, to gather riches, to have easy days, to eat, drink and make merry. These things are the heaven of the natural man.

But what do people gain by forgetting God and walking in sinful pleasures? "*A little while*" and their joy is turned into sorrow. The wicked fare like the people before the flood; like the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. After speaking of the prosperity of the wicked, Asaph, in the 73d Psalm, says of them: "How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors." The way of the ungodly appears to him a pleasant way; he finds it garnished with flowers; the pleasure of sin tastes to him sweet as honey; but this flowery way ends in sorrow and misery. When he comes to die, terrors lay hold upon him, in death his joy is turned into sorrow, and his sorrow no man taketh from him. With the wicked there is first joy, then sorrow. A little while he rejoices, then his joy is turned into never-ending sorrow.

O, the blindness and perverseness of man is beyond comprehension! How many thousands know full well that the way in which they are walking will lead them to destruction? But they like that way, they love it, it is their heart's delight to walk in it, and they will not depart from it. For the short pleasure of

sin which flits away like a shadow, men will barter their soul's salvation, and although they know it, they nevertheless will do it. "Whose damnation is just." Rom. 3, 8.

But with the children of God the reverse is the case. The children of the world first joy, then must sorrow forever; but the children of God first sorrow, then rejoice forever. Of this the Lord speaks plainly in this day's text. Let us therefore briefly consider:

THE CHRISTIAN'S HOPE IN SORROW.

- I. The Christian cannot be spared sorrow; but
- II. His sorrow is followed by joy.

I.

During His long conversation with the disciples in the night before His crucifixion, the Lord frequently mentioned His going to the Father. So here: "*A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father.*" What is His going to the Father? What does He mean by it? His going to the Father was not merely His ascension to heaven, it comprises His suffering, crucifixion, death, resurrection and ascension. All this is comprised in His going to the Father; for through much suffering He had to enter in to His glory. That all this is comprised in His going to the Father is evident from His words. He says, because He was going to the Father, therefore the disciples in a little while would not see Him, and again in a little while, they would see Him. The Lord spake these words when eating the last pass-over in the paved hall, and then it was indeed only "*a little while,*" only a few hours until He was taken in the garden and led away by the band of men who had come to capture Him. Then the disciples fled, and hence, being separated from Him, they did not see Him. So the words were fulfilled: "*A little while, and ye shall not see me.*" And it did not last long until the others were also fulfilled: *And again, a little while, and ye shall see me.*" When He arose the third day the disciples saw Him again.

This is the literal meaning and fulfillment of these words, and after they have been so fulfilled we easily understand them; but the disciples did not understand them. They inquired among themselves: "*What is this that he saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father? They said therefore, What is this that he saith, A little while? we cannot tell what he saith.*" To the disciples these words must have appeared dark; for prophecies are never so plain before as after their fulfillment, and the disciples were yet in error as to the nature of Christ's work and kingdom; but though they understood them not, they preserved the words unchanged as the Lord had spoken them and inquired after their meaning. If there is a word of the Scripture of which we do not know what it means, we must not reject it or put our own construction upon it; we must preserve it as God has given it, and should pray the Lord to open our eyes that we may behold the wondrous things of His law. And if we do faithfully preserve His Word and pray for His light, He will surely enlighten us more and more, as He did the disciples. Unto them He said: "*Do ye inquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me? Verily, verily, I say unto you, that ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.*" It is remarkable that the same words are found three times in this short text, and that the Lord adds a double affirmation in explaining them. He evidently attaches great importance to the words and, indeed, we should keep them in mind all the days of our lives, that we would never give place to sorrowfulness and despondency, but would be joyous in the Lord always.

In this explanation the Lord does not stop at the first and literal meaning of the words. He draws from those short words the most beautiful, instructive and consoling doctrines. The "*little while*" He interprets as the time of sorrow and lamentation, and the "*seeing him again*" as the time of joy and exultation. Without this explanation we might have thought the first

words of our text had only been intended for the disciples, who saw Him again when He was risen from the dead, but here we learn that they concern all His followers, far and near. In the disciples this was, of course, first fulfilled. They had a time of sorrow when the Lord lay dead in the grave. Surely, in that time their hearts must have bled when they considered how suddenly the Lord was taken from them; how faithless they had been, and how their enemies triumphed and exulted. But their sorrow was of short duration. When the Lord rose again, it was turned into joy. Even so the joy of the enemies was of short duration. Quickly it was turned into sorrow and consternation. The chief priests and Pharisees rejoiced to see Jesus of Nazareth, whom they hated so intensely and feared so greatly, raised on the cross. But their joy lasted a little while only. It was cut short by the soldiers announcing His resurrection. Even as it was with the sorrow of the disciples, so with the joy of the Jews.

Now that which befell the disciples is the lot of all true followers of Christ. What the Lord predicted to the disciples, that they must first lament, but after a little while their lamentation would be converted into rejoicing, so He says to all that follow Him: First sorrow, then joy.

Here we are distinctly told what every one must expect who would be a follower of Christ, that he must pass through sorrows before he can taste of the joy of the Lord. Indeed, no one can become a follower of Christ, no one can become a Christian, without first passing through sorrow, the sorrow over sin. Any one who has never yet experienced the sorrow of repentance deceives himself, if he imagines to be Christ's. No man can really and truly joy over the forgiveness of sin who has never yet sorrowed over sin. This cannot be otherwise, because conversion is the turning away of the heart from sin unto Christ. The natural heart loves sin, and it will not turn from sin, neither can it abhor sin, if it is not first crushed with the hammer of the law. The heart must first feel the terrors of the law, it must tremble at the wrath of God, it must labor and sigh under the burden of its guilt, before it will

receive Christ as its Savior. To become a Christian, man must experience what Jeremiah says: "Know and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God." Ch. 2, 19. Before a man can rejoicingly say with David: "Bless the Lord, O my soul: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases," Ps. 103, before a man can heartily speak thus, he must first experience something of that sorrow of which David, in the 38th Psalm, says: "Mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long." If you have never yet experienced the burden of sin, if you can make light of sin, or regard it a light thing, then surely, you are yet in your sins; for the Lord said: "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." Matt. 9, 12. That man alone will pronounce Christ welcome as his physician who knows something of the pangs of conscience caused by the disease of sin.

But here at this place the Lord is not speaking of the sorrow of repentance; for the disciples were already His followers; but of sorrows which the Christian must bear in his pilgrimage to his everlasting home. No one can pilgrim to heaven without bearing the toils and hardships of the pilgrimage. While the Christian is in this world, he must experience sorrow for sorrow; yea, he cannot be altogether without sorrow, even because he is in the world which is Satan's kingdom. Of the multitude of sorrows which befall the Christians let me mention only one which the Lord indicates in our text when He says: "*Ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice.*" He evidently places the sorrow of the Christians and the joy of the world in a certain connection. He does, therefore, not simply mean to say, after He would have gone to the Father the world would go on rejoicing as before; He refers to a particular joy of the world, a joy which causes or increases the sorrows of the Christian, as though He would say: Ye shall be sorrowful and the world will rejoice over your sorrows. The world rejoices over the misfortunes and afflictions of the Christians. So it was in the time of Christ. How did the high priests, scribes and Phari-

sees rejoice, seeing the Lord nailed to the cross! With mocking words the Jews expressed their satanic joy at His death, wagging their heads and saying: "Ah, thou that destroyest the temple and buildest it in three days, save thyself, and come down from the cross." Mark 15, 29. How did the heathen rejoice when murdering the Christians, and with what exultation did they erect monuments, bearing boastful inscriptions, in memory of the imaginary extirpation of that hated sect! With what malicious joy did Papists gather fagots to burn evangelical Christians! In this respect the world has not changed its sentiments, and will never change them. The ungodly hate the Christian secretly in their hearts, and when calamities befall him they rejoice and say: "Behold, he pretended to be so pious; why does not his God help him and make him prosperous in the world?" And if a Christian is overtaken by ever so small a fault, the world will say maliciously: There you can see his hypocrisy. When the Christian must weep, the world rejoices; and if the Christian does not only behold the prosperity of the wicked, but must see their malignity towards him, he is apt to take offence and to become exceeding sorrowful; for Satan will dart thoughts like these into his mind: Can it be true that God is gracious unto thee, seeing the wicked are prosperous and thou afflicted?

This is one of the many sorrows which the Christian must bear; for everything causes him sorrow which tends to hide the Lord from him that he cannot realize His presence. But there is hope in the Christian's sorrow.

II.

The Christian's sorrow is not something eternal. It does not last forever. The Christian's sorrow is not like the sorrow which the wicked must suffer. To the sorrow of the wicked there will be no end, but to the sorrow of the Christian there is an end. "*A little while*," says the Lord, "*and ye shall see me*." The Christian's sorrow lasts "*a little while*." Glorious words! They breathe the hope of coming deliverance and joy. Already on this earth the Christian is not left altogether without joy;

he is often granted to taste the joy of the Lord. He rejoices in as far as he sees the Lord with the eye of faith. He rejoices over the grace of God, the forgiveness of his sins, the promises of the Gospel. And this is not a hollow, boisterous joy like the merry making of the world, it is an inexpressible, secret, still, sweet joy of the soul, like unto the still, small voice which the prophet Elijah heard, and at which he covered his face. If the Christian, so long as he sojourns on this earth, is plagued every morning, he also enjoys moments of light and gladness. Again and again is fulfilled in him what the Lord here says: "*Your sorrow shall be turned into joy.*" Ever and anon does the Lord turn the sorrow of His children into joy. He has said: "Call upon me in the day of trouble," and He has promised: "I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." Ps. 50, 15. He keeps His word, delivering His children and causing them to glorify Him. God makes His children to confess with David: "He hath delivered me out of all trouble." Ps. 54, 7. God permits troubles to beset His children, but He also refreshes them. He grants them times of respite when the heart is still and the soul joyous, and you will agree with me that such moments of the secret joy of the Spirit are far more precious than the highest pleasures which this world can offer. Yes, already in this life there are to the Christian hours of light, when sorrow is forgotten and the soul is lifted up that it triumphantly says:

O Friend of souls, how blest am I
 Whene'er Thy love my spirit calms!
 From sorrow's dungeon forth I fly,
 And hide me in Thy shelt'ring arms.
 The night of weeping flies away
 Before the heart-reviving ray
 Of love, that beams from out thy breast;
 Here is my heaven on earth begun;
 Who is not joyful, that has won
 In Thee, O Lord, his joy and rest?

But the Lord is here not speaking only of days of deliverance and hours of joy, He fully means what His words express: "*Your sorrow shall be turned into joy.*" The time is, when all

sorrows of the Christians are turned into joy, joy everlasting, and that is the time of which Simeon said: "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace;" Luke 2, 29; the time of which the 116th Psalm declares: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." In death the gate to the Eden of perfect joy is opened to the Christian. When the soul departs from this cumbrous clay, that is the precious moment when all sorrow is turned into joy. Of that joy the Lord here tells us three things which the Christian, in part, enjoys already in this life. He says: "*Ye now therefore have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice.*" The joy of this world is never unalloyed; there is always something lurking in the background which spoils it, and makes it but a half-hearted joy, as it is written: "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." Is. 57, 20. The wicked have no peace of heart and conscience, and how could they have true and genuine joy?

In heaven the heart rejoices with full, free, unalloyed joy. There is nothing to trouble, nothing to fear, nothing to mar that joy; "for the former things are passed away." The Lord continues: "*And your joy no man taketh from you.*" On this earth we must always apprehend that the time of joy might quickly end, and clouds of trouble arise, but in heaven we shall joy without fear that the joy might pass away. There will be no one to take it away. It is not a temporary, but an abiding joy. Finally, the Lord says: "*And in that day ye shall ask me nothing.*" In this life our knowledge is piecemeal. We know only in part, and often it smarts us that we see so dimly, and what joy will it be when we shall see into the depths of God's counsel of grace, when we shall behold the connection of the manifold events of our life, and shall understand how all things worked together for our good.

Let not Satan blind you to seek your joy in this world; for the Lord has said: "Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep." Luke 6, 25. And king Solomon says: "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of

feasting. Sorrow is better than laughter. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools." Eccles. 7, 2. These words Solomon wrote in his old age, after he had tested the joys of this world and had found them vanity.

Ye children of God! be not offended, if you must experience many sorrows. The time is coming when you shall see the Lord and your heart shall rejoice, and the sorrows and trials of this life shall be forgotten. Then shall all your sorrows appear unto you like a dream that flitted by and disappeared. O the sweetness, the ecstasy, the bliss of entering the mansions above with the thought: "*A little while*" of sorrow behind, and now an eternity of joy before, joy which no man shall disturb. Then we shall no more ask the Lord: Why was it necessary for me to endure this and to suffer that? Then we shall know all, and taking the harps of praise we shall give honor to the Lamb which brought us out of sorrow through tribulation to the inheritance of the saints in light. O ye who are called to that joy! lift up your heads, when by afflictions you are made like unto your Lord for "*a little while*." Know that, if ye be like unto Him in sorrow, you shall also be like unto Him in glory. Glory in tribulation; rejoice in hope. Amen.

IV. SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

TEXT: But now I go my way to him that sent me, and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you. John 16, 5-15.

Jesus Christ is the One of whom all Scripture treats. He is the sum and summary, the sun and centre of the whole Bible. The Word which the Spirit of God has given speaks to us of the Savior whom God has sent, and this is the object for which the Word is given, to lead men to Jesus Christ. All that we read in the Bible from beginning to end, either directly or indirectly, refers to Jesus Christ, and he, therefore, alone reads the Bible right who so reads it as to find Christ in it. That Christ is the sun and centre of the Scriptures of the Old Testament is evident from His words when He says: "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." John 5, 39. Immediately after the fall of man God gave the promise of the woman's Seed, the Savior, who would restore man again, and this was the religion of the fathers before the flood that they looked for salvation in this promised Seed of woman. Of this same One God spake to Abraham, promising out of his seed He should come, and in Him all families of the earth should be blessed, and this was the religion of the patriarchs that they looked for salvation in this promised

Seed of Abraham. Of this same One God spake by Moses, and prefigured Him to Israel in the paschal lamb, in offerings, sacrifices and manifold types, and this was the religion of every true Israelite that he looked for salvation, not in the works of the law, nor in the sacrificing of beasts and birds, but in Him of whom Moses and the prophets spake, to whom all offerings pointed as to the one true and acceptable offering for sin. That Christ is the sun and centre of the New Testament, is needless to show. It tells us how the long promised Savior came from the house of Judah, and that He not only accomplished the work of redemption assigned to Him from eternity, but gave the Spirit whose office is to glorify Christ in the hearts of men until the end of days.

So the whole Scriptures from end to end testify of Christ, and in all ages, ever since man was driven from paradise, this alone was and is the true religion which leads men to Christ; this alone the right and saving faith which looks to this One Savior of mankind for life and salvation. Those alone have the light of life who look to Christ, the Light of the world; whilst all looking to anything else have walked and do walk in darkness and do not see the light of life. The Bible, indeed, also contains the law which, in itself, knows and says nothing of Jesus Christ, but only tells us what is right and what wrong before God; yet this does by no means overthrow the fact that Christ is the sun and centre of the whole Scriptures; for the Scriptures themselves inform us as to what the office of the law is, namely, not that man should obtain salvation by it, but, says Paul: "By the law is the knowledge of sin." Rom. 3, 20. The office of the law is to reveal sin, to humble the proud heart and so to prepare it to receive salvation as the free gift of God's grace in Christ Jesus, as Paul distinctly declares: "The law was our school-master to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith." Gal. 3, 24. Even the law with its commandments, threats and curses subserves this one great end that men be led unto Jesus, and he only studies the law right who learns from it to know his sins and the curse resting upon him, and who is thereby persuaded ever anew to seek shelter under the cross of

Christ, by Him to escape the wrath to come. Christ is in very deed the Alpha and Omega of the Scriptures; for as in the Greek alphabet Alpha is the first and Omega the last letter, so all Scripture from the first to the last treats of Christ. He is the one and all of the Scriptures.

From this it follows, that we are truly Christians only then when Christ is become one and all unto us; when He is the star of our hope, the sun of salvation shining in our hearts. Permit me, agreeably to the latter part of this text, to speak of:

CHRIST OUR ONE AND ALL.

- I. He is made all unto us of God the Father;
- II. He is all the teaching of the Holy Ghost.

I.

In the last part of this text the doctrine of the mystery of the holy Trinity is contained; for the Lord says: "*All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you.*" The Son has all things that the Father has; hence He has the Divine nature and is equally God with the Father. The Holy Ghost partakes of what the Son has; so He too has the Divine nature and is equally God with the Father and the Son. Yet it was not the object of the Lord at this place to teach us the mystery of the Trinity, or to speak of the relation which the three persons in the Godhead sustain toward one another; but He is speaking of the position which He occupies as the mediator between God and man. In His whole discourse, delivered in the night in which He was betrayed, the Lord sought to comfort the disciples concerning His departing and going to the Father, by showing them that He would not so separate from them as to leave them orphans and to be with them no more in any manner; but by going to the Father He would truly become all things unto them; for thereby He would finish the work which the Father had given Him to do, and the Holy Ghost would come and teach them that He, Jesus Christ, is truly their all, their redemption, their righteousness, their life and their salvation. In other words: The Father has given all things pertaining to the restoration of

man into the hands of Jesus Christ, His Son, and the Holy Ghost is sent to teach men that this Jesus Christ is all unto them, their one and only Savior, but a Savior indeed, who saves from all evil.

Christ is in deed and in truth all unto us in all things pertaining to our salvation. He and He alone is our prophet who has revealed unto us the will of the Father. The prophets and apostles did also reveal the will of God, but without Christ no prophet would have prophesied and no apostle would have preached; for John declares: "Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace;" and then writes: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." Ch. 1, 16, 18. Without Christ we would indeed know by the testimony of our conscience, and we could learn from the works of creation, that there is a God, but of the Father's gracious will toward us we could know nothing. Only in Christ is His grace made known unto us. Yea, without Christ there would be no grace for sinners; for Christ alone fulfilled the law in our stead and won for us justification from sin and righteousness before God; He alone is the propitiation for our sins, and besides Him there is no offering for sin. Christ alone pleads our cause with the Father. Neither the virgin Mary nor our sainted forefathers can bring our petitions before God. He is our one and only advocate.

That Christ is made all unto us of God the Father is unquestionable from our text, and the Scriptures bear witness unto it in many passages and in manifold ways. Thus Paul writes: "Christ Jesus is of God made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." 1 Cor. 1, 30. He is our wisdom; for in Him alone we have the true and saving knowledge of God. He is our righteousness; for alone in His merits are we found righteous. He is our sanctification, because alone through Him we can be made holy. He is our redemption; for it is He who will finally deliver us from all evil and receive us into His everlasting kingdom, as He says, John 6th: "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day." That

He is made all unto us the Lord most emphatically affirms Luke 10, 22, saying: "All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him." Before His ascension He declared: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth," Matt. 28, 18, and after His ascension He said unto John: "I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold I live forevermore; and have the keys of hell and of death." Rev. 1, 18. That Christ, having the keys of hell and of death, is made ruler over all things, this Paul distinctly attests Phil. 2, 9, writing: "God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." Christ is made of the Father ruler over all things, and why the Father exalted Him so highly Christ tells us in the 5th chapter of John, saying: "The Father hath given the Son authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of man." Because the Son became man and shed His blood for the children of men, therefore the Father ordained Him judge over the quick and the dead.

Here is comprised more than human tongue can describe, when the Lord says: "*All things that the Father hath are mine.*" These words make Jesus Christ equal with God the Father in all things. The Father has nothing more than the Son, and the Son nothing less than the Father; for they are one. But *unto us* this Jesus Christ is made all of God the Father. Alone in Christ will the Father treat with men; only in Christ will He be approached by men. The Father will receive no worship except through Jesus Christ; He will hear no prayers unless offered in the name and faith of Christ. Christ is set forth unto us as the door-way to the Father, and there is no way to the Father save through this door-way, Christ, as He says: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." John 14, 6. All service of God not rendered in and through Jesus Christ is idolatry before the

Father. If we would worship God acceptably we must worship Him as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. To call upon the Architect of the universe, or the God of nature, without Jesus Christ, is all in vain.

But if Christ is our all, because in Him *alone* we have access to the Father, He is likewise our all, because in Him we *surely* have access to the Father. Thus Paul writes, Romans 5th: "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand," and Eph. 2, 18, he writes: "Through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." Christ is the throne of grace, He is the door to the Father, and He is an *open* door. At this door no man is refused entrance: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out;" John 6, 37; and He urges all to come, saying: "Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matt. 11, 28. At this door no one was ever refused entrance, and whoso enters by it shall not fail of coming to the Father; for it was the Father who made Christ the door-way unto Himself, and how then could He reject even one of the least of those coming to Him by this door-way? Surely, the Father cannot deny the word of the Son who has said: "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture." John 10, 9. Neither need we dread to approach, because the Father is perfect and we sinful and faulty. In whatsoever we come short Christ supplies it; for He is our all.

I do not invite you to approach that God of holiness who caused His thunders to be heard from Mount Horeb, and who is a consuming fire against every thing unholy; before that God neither you nor I could stand without a mediator. But here is Jesus Christ. He was not sent into the world to erect a throne of justice to judge and to condemn sinners, He is set forth a throne of grace, to relieve them of sin, to dress them in His righteousness and so to present them to the Father holy and without blemish. To this Jesus Christ I ask you to come. Surely, Him you need not dread. Did He not go about in

Judea and Galilee, healing all the sick that came to Him; yea, seeking them in order to help them? Did He not so kindly receive sinners that the Pharisees mockingly said: "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them"? Luke 15, 2. To Him who ate and drank with sinners, you can cheerfully come to lay your burdens at His feet and to trouble your mind about nothing; for He is made all unto you of God and the Father.

II.

Because Christ is made all unto us and we are to embrace Him for our one and all, how shall we come to Him? How shall we come to a living knowledge that He is indeed our all? Or can we at all come to Him? Does not Paul declare: "We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness"? 1 Cor. 1, 23. What can we do to come to the knowledge that Christ is not foolishness, but "the power of God, and the wisdom of God"? Alas, we can do nothing to come to a living knowledge of Christ; for the carnal mind is enmity against God, and of himself the natural man can only despise Christ and turn elsewhere for comfort. If therefore we can not come unto Him what can it benefit us that He is made all unto us of God the Father? O, if He is made *all* unto us He is, certainly, also made this unto us that we come to Him. If Christ had otherwise won all salvation for us, but not this grace that we might come to Him, then His work would help us nothing; for of ourselves we could and would only run farther away from Him. But He has prepared all for us, hence also this grace that we come to Him.

What provision Christ has made to draw and persuade men to come to Him He tells us very plainly, saying: "*I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye can not bear them now. Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth.*" Christ has won for us the gift of the Holy Ghost and it is He that sends Him from the Father, as Peter testified in his Pentecost sermon: "This Jesus, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear." Acts 2, 33. Without Christ's suffering,

death and resurrection the Holy Ghost could not have come to sinners, but since He has gone to the Father He sends the Spirit to open the hearts of men and to teach them to understand things which otherwise would remain foolishness unto them and so to guide men into all truth. The sum and summary of the Holy Ghost's work is that He guides men to know Christ as their one and all. That this is the work of the Holy Ghost St. Paul affirms, writing: "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." 1 Cor. 12, 3. Without the Holy Ghost we could nevermore come to know Christ as our Savior, but the Holy Ghost is given to guide us to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. He is the Spirit of truth who guides into the truth, and who can make no concession to untruth and falsehood. Any spirit which teaches men to say, it would make no difference though the doctrine were not exactly in agreement with God's revealed truth, cannot be the Holy Ghost; for He guides into the truth and nothing but the truth. Where He dwells He creates the love of the truth and makes the heart bold to confess the truth.

How the Holy Ghost guides into all truth the Lord also tells us: "*He shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come.*" The Holy Ghost is not sent to make an addition to the work of Christ, nor to perform a work of His own apart and separate from the work of Christ. It is remarkable that the Lord adds the words: "*He shall not speak of himself.*" The Lord well foresaw that in the last times men would come who would separate the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit. We must not imagine that the Holy Ghost was sent to do something which Christ had left undone. The Spirit is not sent to speak of Himself, but to speak what He hears. What does He hear? This the Lord tells us at another place, saying: "He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." John 14, 26. So the Holy Ghost hears the Word of Christ and this Word He speaks to the hearts of men, and by this Word He dispels the darkness and enlightens the understanding that man begins to see that the Gospel of

Christ is not foolishness, but in very deed "the power of God, and the wisdom of God," as the Lord here continues: "*He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you.*" This is the mission of the Holy Ghost, not to perform another work of salvation different or distinct from that of Christ, but to glorify Christ, to teach men to see and believe that Jesus Christ is in deed and in truth their one and all.

Behold here an infallible criterion whereby to do what St. John commands in ch. 4 of his 1st Epistle, saying: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God." Every spirit which does not speak of Christ and glorify Him as our one and all, is not of God; for of the Spirit of God the Lord says: "*He shall glorify me.*" The Holy Ghost glorifies Christ, teaching the heart what Christ is made unto us of God the Father, and enlightening it with hope.

Jesus Christ is our one and all. God the Father has given all things into His hands, and God the Holy Ghost testifies and teaches that He is all unto us. To Him we must look for all things and whatever we desire we should not doubt in Him it is yea and amen. Permit me, therefore, to conclude with the words of St. Ambrose who most beautifully says: "We have all in Christ, and Christ is all in us. Wouldst thou be healed of wounds, He is the physician; dost thou suffer from heat, He is the fountain; art thou laden with iniquity, He is righteousness; dost thou need help, He is the power; dost thou fear death, He is the life; wouldst thou escape darkness, He is the light; dost thou desire heaven, He is the way; dost thou seek nourishment, He is the bread."

Here rests my heart, and holds it fast:

The Lord I love is First and Last,

The End and the Beginning.

I welcome death; for I shall rise

Through Him to His own Paradise

Above all tears and sinning. Amen.

V. SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

TEXT: Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father. At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: for the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father. His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God. John 16, 23-30.

In the introductory to a sermon on this text Luther says: "This day's Gospel is a persuasive exhortation unto prayer; for next to the Gospel-ministration this is the highest service of God which Christians perform, that they pray." Next to the preaching and hearing of God's Word, Luther pronounces prayer the most important thing in Christian worship, and it is indeed so. The Word of God is the seed by which man is regenerated, as Peter says: "Ye are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God," 1 Pet. 1, 23, and Paul testifies: "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," Rom. 10, 17; and in and through prayer the regenerated soul communes with God. Prayer is the fruit of faith. If faith dwells in the heart it urges man unto prayer, and if a man does not pray he is undoubtedly not in the grace of God. Any one holding no communion with God in prayer cannot possibly be a temple of the Holy Ghost, because the Holy Ghost is "the

Spirit of grace and of supplications." Zech. 12, 10. So important and necessary is prayer that where it is lacking the communion with God is also lacking. Praying with the lips is of course by no means a convincing proof that faith dwells in the heart. The Pharisees of old prayed much, yet they were the enemies of Christ; self-righteous monks and nuns in cloisters strictly observe their vigils praying often night and day, yet they despise the merits of Christ, preferring their own righteousness before the righteousness of God; but though many who pray with the lips are not the children of God, yet it remains true, one who does not pray at all can not be a Christian, because every Christian will pray, and where there is no prayer there is no faith.

Of course, prayer cannot be called a means of grace in the proper sense of the word. Faith and conversion are not the fruit of prayer, but on the contrary, prayer must proceed from faith. Of the doubter it is written: "Let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord." James 1, 7. The prayer of the wicked is so far from being a means of grace that it is rather an abomination to God. Faith must first be kindled in the heart before man can truly pray; but when faith is kindled in the heart man must and will pray, and whenever the Christian ceases to send his petitions up to God, seeking from Him the preservation and strengthening of faith, his faith will quickly decrease and will soon die. Experience teaches and every believing Christian knows that he must continue in prayer if he would remain in the grace of God.

Now as in other exercises of godliness, so also in prayer the Christian meets with obstacles which must be overcome. There is Satan, a bitter enemy of prayer, constantly seeking to hinder it. There is the old Adam, our own perverted heart, continually striving against diligent and fervent prayer and making us indolent and cold in praying. Therefore it is so essentially necessary for us, often to remind ourselves of the high dignity, excellency, and necessity of prayer, so that lukewarmness may not take possession of our hearts. Unto this end let me to-day in accordance with our text speak to you on the subject

OF PRAYER, presenting

- I. What prayer is ;
- II. Why and how we should pray ; and
- III. The certainty of being heard.

I.

When we inquire, what prayer is, it is self-evident that we are speaking only of true and genuine prayer, directed to the true and living God ; for if prayer is directed to idols, as with the heathen, or to a false god, as with the Mohammedans and the present Jews, or to the great spirit, or a supreme being as with the Indians and in lodges, that is not prayer at all, but a dreadful denial of the true God and a profanation of His holy name. The living God says : “ I am the Lord ; that is my name : and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.” Is. 42, 8. If man turns in prayer to another than the one true God, that is in reality not prayer, but robbing the true God of His glory, and it is an abomination to Him. We do self-evidently not regard all those connected with lodges un-Christians ; we know that there are upright children of God amongst them “ which have not known the depths of Satan ; ” Rev. 2, 24 ; nevertheless prayers offered in the meetings of secret orders remain idolatrous, because they are not, or, at least, according to the rules of those orders, are not to be offered to the Triune God, in the name of Jesus Christ. But all prayer not offered to the Triune God in the name of Jesus Christ is not accepted of the Father ; for Christ is the only mediator between God and man and no one cometh unto the Father, but by Him. We Christians should always and at all places be jealous for the honor of our Lord Jesus Christ, and should never and in no way take part in any worship where His name is not allowed, or where the use of it may be forbidden at any time.

True prayer may properly be defined as the conversation of a believing soul with God. Prayer is the familiar intercourse of the Christian with God, when he opens his heart unto God, disclosing to Him his desires, needs and distresses and commend-

ing them to God's fatherly kindness, or when he gives thanks and praise to God for blessings received. This familiar intercourse with God may be exercised in a twofold manner, either so that the tongue gives expression to the thoughts and emotions of the heart in words, which is commonly called praying, or so that the Christian without making any words lifts up his heart with inward sighings and longings of the soul. Both kinds of prayer, that expressed in words, as well as the internal sighing of the heart, are acceptable to God; both kinds are commanded and sanctioned by God. Of a praying heart it is said in the 10th Psalm: "Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear," and to pray with words Christ Himself taught His disciples. David combines both kinds of prayer in the 19th Psalm, saying: "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer." Whether the heart only prays or the tongue expresses the desire of the heart in words, prayer is always a familiar conversation with God in which the supplicator confidently expects the answer Yes to his petitions. Hence let no one think a prayer with words need not be a prayer of the heart. If the lips pray, whilst heart and soul are otherwise occupied, that is idle babbling, hateful to God.

We must therefore distinguish between going through with the formality of prayer, and praying in spirit and in truth. Heathen and hypocrites may go through with the formality of praying, but they cannot pray in spirit and in truth. If a man who is a professing Christian is given to intemperance he may say his prayers, but there is no confidence, life and spirit in his prayer, because there is this consciousness in him that the sin which he fosters is a barrier between him and God. The church member whose heart is given to the love of money may be loud and long in his prayers, but spirit and truth will not be in them, because his affections are set on earthly things, and he is not seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Hence St. Paul writes: "I will that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting." 1 Tim. 2, 8. No

one who is living in the love of sin and the world, no unconverted man can lift up holy hands without wrath and doubting. An unconverted man may be vociferous in his praying, but he cannot call upon God as a dear child on its dear father. That man alone can cry: "Abba, Father," from heart and soul in whom the Holy Ghost has kindled this trust and confidence that God is truly his Father through Jesus Christ. Praying without this confidence is nothing but babbling which God has earnestly threatened to punish, saying: "Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people." Is. 29, 13. Tongue and heart must correspond, otherwise it is mere prattle and not prayer. Why and how to pray let us learn from the Lord's words in our text.

II.

In the first place, we learn here that the command and promise of God are to be the foundation of our prayers. The Lord says: "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you,*" and again He says: "*Ask, and ye shall receive.*" Scripture is full of such commands and promises of God that we are commanded to pray and that He will hear us. We are not to look upon prayer as something which we might do or omit as we pleased. We are to pray, not because we are so disposed, or because it suits us to do so, but because God has commanded it. Neither is the hope of meriting any thing to incite us to prayer. Very often people think they deserve God's favor for the very reason, because they pray, but asking is not earning. When we pray we should always remember that it is doing nothing more than God requires of us. The Word and command of God is to be the foundation of our prayer. This gives assurance and confidence to the heart, if we say unto God: Not after my own thoughts, but for the sake of Thy command, because Thou hast bidden me, do I present my requests before Thee. So David prays in the

27th Psalm, saying: "When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek." Resting on God's command our prayers stand on a good foundation.

Together with the command of God we must diligently consider His promise, that He has promised to hear prayer. The Lord does not only say: "*Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you,*" He adds the double affirmation: "*Verily, verily.*" Our Lord Jesus Christ is Himself the truth. His Word is the Word of unalterable truth and it needs no confirmation, but to His truthful Word He adds a double affirmation to take away from us all doubt of His promise. Christ here speaks of the hearing of prayer in the same manner as God in the Old Testament repeatedly spake of the coming of the Messiah, whereof we read, Hebrews 6th: "God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation." In like manner Christ here promises the hearing of prayer, and confirms His promise by an oath, that by these two immutable things which cannot be broken, His promise and His oath, we might have the strong consolation that our prayers penetrate through the clouds into the ears of the Lord of hosts. We are to pray building our heart's trust on the Word and Oath of the Lord and not doubting that our prayers are heard.

If prayer is to be pleasing and acceptable to God, it must proceed from faith. God can surely not graciously receive prayer which is offered to Him with the heart full of doubt; for doubting the truth of God's promise must provoke Him to anger, because doubt would make Him a liar. As oft as you pray, see that you doubt not the promise and pledged Word of the Lord, but let your heart ascribe to Him the honor that He is a God of faithfulness and truth. And why should we ever give room to doubt in our prayers? Can God be unfaithful? He has said and He has sworn that He hears prayer and, surely, we should always be ready cheerfully to say with St. John: "This is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything accord-

ing to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." 1 John 5, 14. That is a heart rightly prepared and fitted for prayer which trusts that its petition is already heard.

Whence shall we obtain such bold confidence in prayer? How are we miserable sinners to know that our feeble sighing and stammering is agreeable to the holy and righteous God? Does not the Scripture say that God heareth not sinners? Certainly it does, and because God without mediation will not and cannot hear sinners, for this reason we must pray in the name of Jesus, as He here says, "*In my name;*" and this name is what makes us so certain that God will hear us. In himself no one is worthy to appear before God in prayer, much less is any worthy that God should hear him, but even the best and most pious must confess with Daniel: "O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces." Dan. 9, 7. The prophet Daniel was surely a just and pious man, but he, too, was of himself not worthy to stand before God; for he says: "We do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousness, but for thy great mercies." V. 18. Of himself none is worthy to appear before God's seat of holiness and, therefore, the feeling of unworthiness which we so frequently experience, should not deter us from prayer; for our worthiness must come from another source than our own selves.

Who is it that makes us worthy? It is He that says in our text: "*I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father.*" He came into the world to make us His brothers and sisters, children of God, joint heirs with Himself, and when He had finished this work He ascended again to His Father and to our Father. Who could doubt that God, the Father, accounts His Son who bare our sins, worthy to appear before Him since the Father has exalted Him to His own right hand? Now if we come to the Father with our petitions in the name of Christ must we then not be worthy that He incline His ear to us to hear our prayers? This worthiness is, of course, not of us, it

is of Christ, but it is for us, it belongs to us, and that it is acceptable in the sight of God we know from Christ's going to the Father.

What great delight the Father takes in our coming to Him in the name of His Son we most clearly see from the words which the Lord here addressed to the disciples, saying: *I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: for the Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.*" Was Christ not minded to make intercession for us? He is truly our advocate who brings our prayers before the Father, pleading for us, but because we love Christ and believe that He is our Lord and Savior who came from the bosom of the Father, therefore the Father counts us His own beloved children and is heartily ready to hear our prayers even before the intercession of His Son. This, therefore, is praying in the name of Christ, if we acknowledge that we ourselves are unworthy to stand before God, but that the righteousness of Christ is our robe of honor before the Father, not doubting that for the sake of Christ's blood and righteousness our petitions are heard and accepted in heaven.

III.

That no prayer of a believer perishes unheard, but that God hears each and every prayer, is plainly declared in our text; for here Christ says: "*Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you,*" and: "*Ask, and ye shall receive.*" In several other passages He speaks still more distinctly and positively. Matthew 18th He says: "If two of you shall agree on earth, as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven;" and Mark 11th: "What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." Those are clear and strong words and direct promises. But how shall we bring these unmistakable promises of the Lord into agreement with experience? Is it not a very frequent occurrence that something is asked in prayer and is not received? This is indeed something very frequent, and there are people who are quick

to question the Lord's promises, yea, to reject the whole Bible, if God does not immediately answer their prayers in the manner in which they desire it. But what shall we say here? Christ so distinctly declares: "*Whatsoever ye shall ask,*" and yet many ask and receive nothing? First of all we must mark well that Christ does here not speak absolutely, or in an unlimited manner, but conditionally; for He clearly means to say: Ask in faith, as in Mark He adds the words: "Believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." Many hundreds pray without faith, or in doubt. To them God has promised nothing and gives nothing. Whosoever is ready to question the truth of the Bible, because God will not instantly do what he has prayed for, thereby only reveals the unbelief of his heart.

Moreover, the Lord here adds the limitation: "*In my name.*" Whatever is not asked with reliance on the merits of Christ God has not promised to give. But how many pray relying not on the merits of Christ, but trusting in their own worthiness, piety and virtues? Praying in the name of Christ we can also ask nothing which is against the honor of Christ. If a miser, prompted by avarice, prays for worldly prosperity, that is an evil prayer which God can not graciously hear. We must well consider what Solomon says: "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." Prov. 28, 9. God will not hear the prayer of those who are not minded to depart from wickedness. But how many live in sin and yet demand that God should hear their prayers. God will not hear the prayers of unbelievers and hypocrites, but that does surely not overthrow the Lord's promises; for He means: Ask in the faith of Christ as the children of God, and not as un-Christians.

But does it not also occur that Christians ask something in sincere faith and yet do not receive it? It must be conceded that this, too, is nothing uncommon. Paul thrice besought the Lord to relieve him of the thorn in the flesh and the Lord did not do it; but it must not be forgotten that God did hear Paul's supplications and did help him, although in a different manner than Paul thought. God does hear every prayer of a believing

Christian and He does help, but not always according to our will; for our ways are very often not His ways. Hence, in all our prayers we should conform our will to the will of God, that in all things His will may be done. What is God's will? His will is our salvation. Consequently, all things pertaining to our salvation we should ask of Him unconditionally as they are promised. In other things which are not absolutely necessary for our salvation God's will is to guide us according to His wise counsel, and these things we should always commit to His wisdom. For instance, that I may die in faith, I can, so to say, directly demand of God, because in this point I can hold Him by His own declaration that He wants all men saved: but *when* He is to take my soul to paradise, whether to-day or twenty years hence, for that I have no special word of God, and I should commit it to His wisdom. So we should set aside self-will in all our prayers, and should submit ourselves to the will of God that our will be not against, but uniform with His will. And in such prayer we should daily exercise ourselves with great diligence, not only because faith must decrease when the fervency of prayer abates, but also because the Lord here says: "*Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.*" He that prays much has much joy of heart. He that prays often for the forgiveness of sins becomes sure and surer thereof, and that makes the heart joyous. He that prays often for the grace of God continually grows in grace, and that makes the heart joyous. He that prays often for the gift of the Holy Ghost will receive Him the more abundantly, and that makes the heart joyous. He that prays often for the crown of life becomes the more rooted and grounded in hope, and that makes the heart joyous. "*Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.* Amen.

ASCENSION.

TEXT: Afterward he appeared unto the eleven, as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief, and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe: In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. So then, after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen. Mark 16, 14-20.

Ascension is the last of the festivals instituted by the ancient church in commemoration of Christ's works. Good Friday pictures Him standing in the battle against our enemies; Easter speaks to us of His victory over death, and Ascension is the day of His coronation, when God the Father crowned Him with honor and majesty for the war and victory which He waged and won against and over our enemies; for because He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, therefore God highly exalted Him, and gave Him a name which is above every name.

After His resurrection the Lord yet walked on earth forty days, during which time He frequently appeared to the disciples, spake and even ate with them. But when the time had come that He was to return to His Father and to our Father, to His God and to our God, He gathered His disciples together and led them to that mount where His last sufferings had commenced and where He had sustained the severest struggle with the powers of darkness, to the mount of Olives. After giving His last instructions to the disciples He lifted up His hands to bless them and thus with uplifted hands blessing His own He was

lifted up from the earth higher and higher until a cloud hid Him from the view of the disciples. There they stood gazing at the cloud in which He had disappeared, and well may their hearts have been filled with sadness, because their eyes were to behold their beloved Lord and Master no more upon this earth.

Is the ascension of the Lord a sorrowful, or is it a joyful event? Should we be sad or glad when we remember His ascension? In the Lord's ascension there is surely no occasion for sadness. Where is a faithful subject who would not rejoice over the coronation of his beloved sovereign? David sang with exultation of the Lord's ascension; for in the 47th Psalm he says: "O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph. God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises." So David exulted, foreseeing in the spirit the Lord's ascension. How much more should we exult over His ascension, we, to whom is revealed the full import of that glorious event? How could we other than rejoice, if we but remember the words which He spake while upon earth saying: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." John 14, 2. He has gone to prepare mansions for us, and this is not a reason to be sorrowful. Permit me therefore to speak of:

THE COMFORT WHICH THE LORD'S ASCENSION AFFORDS.

- I. It serves to strengthen our faith in Him;
- II. It assures us of His gracious presence with us.

I.

In the 68th Psalm David says of the Lord's ascension: "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." David, foreseeing the Lord's ascension, comforted his heart with it; for after the words quoted, which unquestionably treat of the Lord's as-

cension, he says: "Our God is the God of salvation; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death." Contemplating the Lord's ascension, David was cheerful and bold against death and all afflictions; for he said: The Lord will ascend and will lead my captivity captive and will make me free. And yet David had only the promise, the fulfillment of which was yet far distant in the future. This was what made David the man after the heart of God, his faith, that he depended freely on what he could not see, yea, which had not yet come to pass, which was as yet only promised for the future.

It was different with the disciples of Christ. These were not willing to believe except they would see with their eyes, hear with their ears and touch with their hands, so that even at the very last the Lord "*upbraided them with their unbelief, and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.*" Long as the Lord had walked with them, much as He had instructed them, their hearts were slow to believe. Especially at the resurrection of the Lord did their unbelief become manifest. The testimony of those women unto whom the Lord had appeared, they would not believe; yea, Thomas would not believe the testimony of all the disciples unless he would see the Lord with his eyes and touch Him with his hands. In short, the disciples did not want to believe, they wanted to see and feel, and for this the Lord upbraided them. The Lord had told them beforehand, the third day He would rise again. On that self-same day His resurrection was proclaimed to them by such persons of whom they knew that they loved the truth and detested falsehood; yea, the Lord sent them a kind message by Mary Magdalene. Yet they would not believe. This was surely hardness of heart.

Why was this so very reprehensible in the disciples? Should they not rather be lauded for desiring to make certain before they would believe? Is it not always wise to make certain of a thing before receiving it for a fact? It is certainly a true and sound principle, to receive only that as a fact which is positively certain. If a man depends on that which is uncertain, he is acting very foolishly. What for then did the Lord

upbraid the disciples? He upbraided them, because they had the divine certainty of His resurrection, but set that certainty aside and would not believe. What is more certain than the Word of the Lord? What the Lord says, is certain. If any thing in heaven or on earth is certain, the Lord's Word is certain. What He says can not fail, or deceive, or be doubtful. His Word is infallible. Now the disciples had the Lord's Word that He would rise again the third day. Was it then not infallibly certain? When He had said He would rise again, was there any possibility of His remaining in death? After the Lord had said He would rise again, it was unquestionably certain that He would and must rise again, because His Word could not be broken. But this certainty which the Word gives did not satisfy the disciples. They wanted a different kind of certainty. They wanted the certainty of sight and sense, of feeling and touching, and this the Lord here calls "*unbelief and hardness of heart.*" They wanted to depend on the perception of their senses, rather than on the Word of the Lord.

Behold here the awful wickedness of unbelief. Those who will not believe the Word of the Lord, commit the most terrible sin, a sin greater than murder or adultery. Here the Lord connects these two: "*Unbelief and hardness of heart.*" It is hardness of heart not to believe what the Lord says. Indeed, all who disbelieve or doubt the Word of the Lord, render God a liar, and that is a dreadful thing. Surely, upon those who believe not the Word of God and so pronounce His Word a falsehood, a dire judgment will fall; for when about to take His seat at the right hand of the Father the Lord upbraided the disciples for this very sin, and He distinctly declares: "*He that believeth not shall be damned.*"

Learn here that the Word of the Lord is to be sufficient unto us, and we are to seek nothing else besides the Word on which to rest our faith. That the disciples wanted to see and feel before they would believe, the Lord pronounces "*unbelief and hardness of heart.*" Why so hard a judgment? Because neither the report of those who had seen Him after He was risen, nor the words which the Lord Himself had spoken to them before

His death could convince them, but they wanted the evidence of their own seeing and feeling, and what was that other than unbelief, distrusting and doubting the Lord's Word? If you promise to give a man a dollar, but he declares that he must first see the dollar, or must feel it in his hand before he will be convinced that you will give it to him, you will say: That man does not trust my word. The same verdict God will pass on all who want to see and feel before they will accept His Word as infallibly true and certain.

This is saving faith, if we rely on those things which we do not and cannot perceive with the senses, but which God has told us in His Word, as the Lord says to Thomas: "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." John 20, 29. We should cling to the Word which the Lord has spoken, let the devil, the world, our flesh, our understanding, our feeling say what they please. Though we can see nothing in us but unrighteousness, and feel nothing save only the accusation of conscience and the condemnation of the law, yet we should cling to the Word: "*He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved.*" If our own heart condemn us, as it truly does and must because we are sinners, yet we should believe what the Word says, that Jesus Christ is our righteousness and our salvation. This is the faith which the Epistle to the Hebrews 11, 1 describes as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." The Word of the Lord must be sufficient unto us. What the Word says we should steadfastly believe, though we see it not, feel it not, understand it not.

The Lord's ascension to heaven should teach us so to believe; for He spake to the disciples of these things at His ascension that, when they would see Him no more, they should cleave so much the more firmly to His Word. He has withdrawn His visible presence from the earth. We can not see Him, we can not touch Him, we can not lay our fingers into the nail-prints within His hands; but He has left us His Word; this we have with us, and this Word we are to believe, and through this faith we shall be saved; for He says: "*He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved.*" Therefore this should be the language

of our heart: I am baptized, I believe His Word, I shall be saved; and who is he that shall hinder it, seeing my Lord has ascended on high and has led my captivity captive? Because He has withdrawn His visible presence from the earth it is evident that we can have part with Him only through faith in His Word. Therefore we should not be unbelieving, neither should we desire any thing besides His Word, but we should say with David: "O Lord, I trust in thy word." Ps. 119, 42.

To believe the Word we should likewise learn from the Lord's last command to the disciples: "*Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature;*" for to this command He immediately adds the promise: "*He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved.*" What must we believe in order to be saved? Why that which He commands the apostles to preach, that is, the Gospel. What is the Gospel? The Gospel is the message that the gates of paradise are re-opened, that sin, which separated God and man from each other, is put away, and that everlasting righteousness is regained. This blessed message the Lord bids the apostles preach to the world, and that it is a message faithful and true He establishes by His ascension to heaven. His ascension is the final evidence that His work of redemption is finished. Behold, He had come down from heaven to redeem the world and to prepare salvation for all men; therefore His visible return to heaven is the public evidence that He has finished His work upon earth to the satisfaction of the Father and that all things are now ready, otherwise He could not have appeared before the Father; for if He had not finished His work, if He had left the very least undone, the Father would not have exalted Him to His right hand. But the Father did exalt Him, and thereby He acknowledged that the Son has performed His mission faithfully and perfectly.

Because He had finished the work and the Father had accepted it, therefore He could command the disciples to go and preach the Gospel, that is, to tell men: Heaven is open for you sinners; come ye and enter in. What must we do to obey this message? Why, there is nothing else to be done, and there is no other way to obey it, than simply and only to accept it in

faith. The Gospel is such a message which makes no demands at all on us, it simply tells us that the Son of God died in our sins and gained everlasting salvation for us. This message asks nothing of us, it simply tells us what the Son of God has done for us. If we believe it, if we make it our comfort and plea we have the benefit of it; and the Lord's ascension to heaven is certainly something which should draw us unto faith, which should persuade us to believe the message of the Gospel. The Gospel can not be untrue, it must be true, because the Lord who commanded it to be preached in the world immediately thereafter ascended up to heaven. One who commands a lie to be preached can certainly not ascend up to heaven, he can only descend down to hell. But that Lord who commanded the Gospel to be preached directly thereafter ascended up to heaven. Therefore the Gospel must be God's truth; the Lord's ascension demonstrates it to an evidence. It's a reality, it's a fact, there is salvation for us sinners, and we should be believing and not unbelieving.

II.

But the Lord's ascension to heaven does not only teach us firmly to believe in Him whom we do not see, it also assures us that He, the Lord Himself, is present with us continually; for thus it is said of the disciples: "*And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.*" This is something which reason can not comprehend, how the Lord, having ascended up to heaven, can still be with His disciples on earth. Therefore many, following the dictates of reason, deny His presence on earth and teach that the divinity only is present every where and His humanity limited to a certain locality in heaven. But it is very evident that we must judge of the Lord and His works by His own revealed Word and not by the principles of our reason. And what does the Word say? It says that the Lord worked with the disciples confirming the Word. So the Lord was present with them. What Lord? Certainly the same Lord of whom the foregoing verse speaks; "*So*

then, after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God." That same Lord who was received up into heaven, thereafter worked with them as present with them and confirmed the Word wherever they preached. But the Lord was received up according to His humanity; for the disciples saw Him ascending up; so the text plainly says that in His humanity He was present with the apostles. Christ did not so ascend up to heaven like Enoch and Elijah who were taken away from the earth, but St. Paul writes to the Ephesians: "He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things." Eph. 4, 10.

We must not think so unworthily of Jesus Christ as to imagine Him sitting on a grand throne limited to one certain locality similar as a Chinese idol sits in a temple. He did not only ascend up into heaven, He went up "far above all heavens," and how high this is He Himself tells us in the 6th chapter of John saying: "Ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before." Where was He before? John says: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John 1, 1. He was when there was no time and no locality, and because He ascended up where He was before, it follows of necessity that He ascended up above time, space, locality and every created thing. So high did Jesus Christ, the Son of man, ascend up that He sits where He sat before the creation, that He sits on the throne of God and is where God is, present with all creatures. The Lord indeed so departed from the earth that He is no more visibly at a certain place as He was with the disciples, but withdrawing His visible presence from the earth He remained invisibly present everywhere. By His ascension the Lord did not go away so as to be now far distant from us, on the contrary, His ascension proves that He is very nigh unto us, because, as Paul says, He ascended up "that He might fill all things."

O verily, a comforting truth! Our Savior, the Friend of our souls, is not far distant from us enclosed at some certain place beyond the stars, He is nigh unto us, and with Him is

His grace, His righteousness, His power and His strength. The Shepherd is not far distant from His fold, He is in the midst of His flock. Cheerfully should we spend our days on this earth. If we see and feel our sinfulness we have no reason to despair. The Same who was sacrificed for sin on the cross is with us, "and He is the propitiation for our sins." If the law accuses us we can soothe our conscience with the truth that He is with us who was made under the law and fulfilled all righteousness for us. If we see our weakness and the power of the enemies we need not be terrified, because that very Lord is with us into whose hands all power is given in heaven and on earth. When disappointments and trials come upon us and we are tempted to murmur, because we see not what they are for, we should put away discontent, knowing that the Lord is with us who sees into our innermost heart and soul; who knows what is dangerous and knows what is good for us, and who daily so guides and governs our steps that we may reach the mansions which He has prepared for us.

And if the Lord is with us He is certainly not idle, He also works with us. He does now no more work miracles so manifest to the eyes of men as He did with the apostles, but He nevertheless works miracles. He makes us new creatures from heart and soul, and that is a miracle; He makes us who are by nature the enemies of God, to love God, and that is a miracle; He makes us who know that we deserve only everlasting death confidently to hope for everlasting life, and that is a miracle; He makes us sinners the beloved sons and daughters of God, and that is a miracle. Yes, He works with us and if we drive Him not away from us He will work our souls to heaven.

Since Christ has gone to heaven, His home,
I, too, that home one day must share,
And in this hope I overcome
All doubt, all anguish, and despair:
For where the Head is, well we know,
The members He has left below
In time He surely gathers. Amen,

VI. SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

TEXT: But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me. And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning. These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you, will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you. John 15, 26-16, 4.

In the 28th chapter of his Proverbs Solomon says: "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." If a man knows what the law of God commands or forbids in any particular point and, notwithstanding this knowledge, he will nevertheless intentionally not do what is commanded, or will deliberately do what is forbidden: that man can not pray acceptably, can not be a follower of Christ and can not possess the grace of God. Whosoever does intentionally what he knows to be sin, is not a Christian. Every Christian is often overtaken by sin; because of the weakness of the flesh he daily commits much sin; but the Christian does not sin willingly and intentionally, as St. John writes: "We know that whosoever is born of God, sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God, keepeth himself." 1 Ep. 5, 18. The Christian hates sin and he does not want to sin. His aim is to keep himself from sin, and when he sins it occurs without and against his intention and will. Every one, therefore, who intentionally and willingly surrenders himself to sin, has not the Spirit of God dwelling in him. Men, of course, have scores of excuses for committing sin. A man will persuade himself that he could not avoid a certain thing which he knows to be wrong, or he

would lose too much by not doing it, or it would serve a good end and purpose, and the like; but all such excuses are nothing but subterfuges to pacify conscience. It remains a fact, if a man refuses to do what he knows is commanded, or consents to do what he knows is forbidden, and so knowingly and intentionally acts in violation of the law of God, that man is not a Christian and unless he repents he can not be saved.

This same principle obtains not only in actions commanded or forbidden in the law, but also in matters of faith and doctrine. If a man knows that the Bible teaches a certain doctrine, but he nevertheless refuses to accept and confess that doctrine; and if a man knows that a certain doctrine is against the Bible, but he nevertheless adheres to and sanctions that doctrine, he can not be a son of God, but to him applies what Samuel said to Saul: "Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee." 1 Sam. 15, 23. Any one who rejects any teaching which he knows to be founded in the Bible, and any one who by word or deed sanctions any teaching which he knows to be against the Bible, knowingly sets himself in opposition to the Word of God and he is not a follower, but an opponent of God. Of himself and all true Christians St. Paul writes: "We can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth." 2 Cor. 13, 8. Both those who refuse to do what the law commands, and those who refuse to accept and confess what the Gospel teaches, they both set themselves against God and cannot be God's children and heirs. It is a plain truth, whosoever acts against his own better knowledge in violation of the Word of God, be it in whatsoever matter it will, is not a Christian.

But suppose a man was never instructed in the law and Gospel, and therefore does what is against the law, or opposes the truth of the Gospel from ignorance, yet with an honest and upright heart; or, if a man has an erring conscience so that he regards wrong what is right, or accounts that falsehood which is God's truth, and so from a sense of duty opposes the truth and promotes error, shall that man be condemned? That is a question touched on in this text, and it is well worthy that we should thoroughly examine it. The common answer given in our

times is: It would make no difference what a man believed, if he were only sincere in his faith. There is probably not another opinion which is so widespread in our times and which exercises such a vast influence on the religious life of our country than this which would make man's sincerity primary and the belief of the truth secondary. It is easy to see that this opinion is a root of indifferentism and a powerful factor to promote irreligion. It is one of the errors of the times, and is of such a seductive character that all lovers of the truth should warn against it. Accordingly permit me to set forth:

WHY WE SHOULD BEWARE OF RESTING CONTENT WITH
BEING SINCERE IN OUR FAITH?

I answer,

I. Because the Word of God alone is to be the foundation and rule of our faith;

II. Because sincerity in their own opinions may lead men to the greatest crimes; and

III. Because not every belief, but only the belief of the truth can save.

I.

The question before us is not, whether a man should be sincere in his faith; for it is something self-evident that no man is to be a hypocrite. No man should profess to believe what in fact he does not believe. Every man, be he Christian, Jew or Gentile, is to be sincere in his faith. Hypocrites who with the mouth profess to believe what at heart they do not believe, shall find no favor with God. "The hypocrite's hope shall perish." Job 8, 13. Neither is this the question, whether a man who sincerely believes the substance of the Gospel truth unto salvation, yet from ignorance errs in some points of doctrine, can be saved; for we know that a man may err in many points of doctrine and may yet possess saving faith in Christ. The question is, whether it is right and true when it is said, it would make no difference what a man believed, if he were only sincere in that faith? The short answer is, that this is an entirely wrong and an extremely harmful opinion.

The first argument by which it is proved wrong is this: Because by it the Bible would be set aside as the only rule and standard of our faith. If sincerity were sufficient and it would make no difference what a man believes provided he is sincere, then it would be an indifferent thing, whether he believes what the Bible says or something else. Then the Mormon and Mohammedan might fare as well with his faith as the Christian with his. If sincerity in one's faith were all required then it would be all the same, whether a man believed the Bible or the Book of Mormon, or the Koran of the Mohammedan, or the Vedas of the Brahmin. This opinion, therefore, would make all religions alike and a man might choose whatever he pleased for the foundation and standard of his faith.

From our text it is very evident that there is only one rule and standard of faith; for here the Lord says of the Holy Ghost: "*He shall testify of me.*" How the Holy Ghost would testify of Him the Lord had told the disciples before already, saying: "He shall bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." John 14, 26. Because this was to be a work of the Holy Ghost the Lord goes on: "*And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.*" Because the disciples had been with the Lord, had seen His deeds and heard His words, therefore they were to go into all the world and to testify unto men, not their own views and opinions, but what they had seen and heard when with the Lord. Again the Lord says: "*These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended.*" In their own faith and belief the disciples were to be guided by the words which their Master had spoken unto them; by His words they were to judge of all things which would happen unto them. Again: "*But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them.*" They were to remember His words. His words were to preserve them from being offended in afflictions and persecutions. So far is the Lord from allowing His disciples liberty to believe what they pleased that He distinctly binds them down to His words; these they were to remember; these were to be the foundation and rule of their

faith. On another occasion the Lord said: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed:" John 8, 31; and by the prophet Isaiah in the 8th chapter the Lord says: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Those only who follow the Word, the law and the testimony, have the light, and they who do not abide in the Word, walk in darkness; for the inspired Word of God alone is the true light.

And though a man would argue, the idols of the heathen could, of course, not save, but within the pale of Christendom it would make no difference what a man believed, this would still not better the matter, because it would nevertheless be setting aside the Bible as the only rule of faith; for this saying certainly implies, even if a man believed what the Bible does not teach it would not matter, provided he be sincere. The Bible speaks otherwise. Jeremiah, chapter 23d, we read: "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord." Should it really make no difference, whether a man's creed is chaff or wheat? Isaiah, 65th chapter, the Lord says: "I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts; a people that provoketh me to anger continually to my face; that sacrificeth in gardens, and burneth incense upon altars of brick." The liberal and progressive of those days in Israel no doubt argued, it would make no difference whether a man sacrificed on an altar of unhewn stone or of burned brick, only so he sacrificed unto the Lord, but the Lord did not regard it indifferent. He called them a rebellious people. In the 22d chapter of Revelations the Lord says: "I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book. If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life." God has given His Word that men should hear, accept and believe it without adding to or taking from it, and to say it would

make no difference what a man believed, is certainly speaking against God and is setting aside His Word as the one and only rule of faith. We should, therefore, take warning and should beware of a principle by which the supreme authority of the Bible would be destroyed.

Delusive as is the first part of that common saying, even so deceptive is the latter part concerning man's sincerity. Let us briefly examine it.

II.

Here again we must distinguish well. We have already heard that no man is to be a hypocrite. Every one is to be sincere in his profession and faith. The question here is, whether it is sufficient unto true godliness in this world and salvation in the world to come, if a man is sincere in what he believes, even when it is not the truth of God? This question also we must answer most emphatically in the negative.

To what sincerity in their own opinions, or sincerity in believing the doctrines of men, may lead this the Lord here distinctly declares, foretelling the disciples what men would do to them: "*They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.*" Here the Lord tells the disciples, men would do evil unto them, even to putting them to death; and these things men would do, not knowing they were doing evil, but from zeal for God, in all sincerity thinking they were doing God service. A few examples will illustrate this. Against Stephen, the first martyr of Christ, the accusation was brought: "This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us." Acts 6, 13. On the strength of this accusation the Jews thrust him out of the city and stoned him to death. They killed him from zeal for the temple and the law of Moses, sincerely believing that they were doing God service. When Stephen was stoned, Saul, there-

after called Paul, looked on with great satisfaction and from that time on he exerted all his energies to wipe out the name of Jesus from the earth, and in what sentiment he did this he states in his defense before king Agrippa saying: "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." Acts 26, 9. Saul persecuted the disciples without any compunctions of conscience, in all sincerity believing that he could do no greater service to God than to extirpate this sect from the face of the earth. And as it was in the time of the apostles so it remained thereafter even unto this day. When John Huss was burned, he, seeing a poor peasant bring a bundle of fagots, exclaimed: "O sacred simplicity." That peasant thought it a great service of God to help burn this servant of Christ, in all sincerity regarding him an abominable heretic. At the time of the Reformation the Roman Catholics put the Protestants to death "unto the greater glory of God," in all sincerity believing that they were doing God service. Some time ago the papers reported several instances in our own country of parents murdering their own children, because they believed to have command from God to do so. A man must certainly be very sincere in his faith, if for his faith's sake he can kill his own child.

Behold, where sincerity in their faith will lead men if their faith is wrong. I confine myself to mentioning only a few of the most flagrant examples, because these are abundantly sufficient conclusively to show that sincerity in one's faith is by no means enough to keep men from doing evil. The more sincere a man is in believing an error, the more fanatical will he be in upholding that error, the more determined in opposing the truth with which that error conflicts. It is a sad fact, but nevertheless a fact, if a false faith possesses the heart, men will be so blinded by it as to regard the truth of God abominable heresy; as to condemn what they have never read or examined. Yea, sincerity in a false faith will make men so unfeeling and cruel that without compassion they can persecute the witnesses of God's truth and can put them to death. When Paul spoke at Jerusalem in his defense, the Jews raised the cry: "Away with such

a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live." Acts 22, 22. Even so the Mohammedan exults to shed the blood of Christians, yea, the more Christians he can kill the more he rejoices, because he sincerely believes that his place in paradise will be so much the higher. Simply to be sincere in one's faith, whatever that faith may be, is by no means sufficient unto a truly pious and godly life in this world, because sincerity in and zeal for a false faith can only lead men into blindness and sin.

III.

Now if sincerity in a false faith can only lead farther away from the truth and may lead to the perpetration of the most dreadful crimes, should, then, sincerity be sufficient unto salvation? This is the actual idea connected with that saying: if only a man were sincere in his faith, he would be saved no matter what his religion might be. Put in this form it certainly bears the stamp of delusion on its very face. If it were true that a man's sincere profession of his religion would save him, why then should the Son of God have come to reveal unto us the will of His Father? Why would the Gospel be preached? Why send missionaries to the heathen if by sincerely believing their religion they could be saved? It is not sincerity in any faith, but sincerity in the faith of the truth as it is in Jesus that is required unto salvation. In our text the Lord says: "*But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.*" The Holy Ghost is "*the Spirit of truth.*" Where He dwells He creates the love of the truth, and where there is not the love of the truth the Holy Ghost does not dwell, and where He does not dwell there is no salvation. This is evident from the words of the Lord in the 12th chapter of John, saying: "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." The judgment of the last day will not be held so that every one would be judged according to his sincerity in believing his religion, that the Cath-

olic would be saved because he sincerely believed in the pope, the Rationalist because he sincerely believed common sense the light to be guided by, etc., but the Lord says: "The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." Those who received not the Word of Christ will be brought into judgment, and that Word will condemn them, though they had ever so sincerely believed other things which are not the Word of Jesus. But those will be heirs of the kingdom who receive the words of Christ and in all sincerity of heart and soul believe them, those who are sincere in the belief of the truth.

Likewise, the knowledge and belief of the truth is the only true safeguard against treading on the paths of intolerance and persecution. "*These things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.*" Intolerance toward others is the fruit of ignorance and error. Where the truth of the Gospel is known intolerance is banished. The truly orthodox church bears witness to the truth of the Gospel and she rebukes errors with the Word of God, but she never becomes intolerant, she never uses any other than the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. When James and John once proposed to cause fire from heaven to fall on a village that would not receive them, Jesus rebuked them, saying: "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." Luke 9, 55. With sharp and stinging words did Jesus reprimand the hypocrisy and the false doctrines of the Pharisees, and He foretold the destruction which would fall on them if they received Him not, but force and violence Jesus distinctly forbade His followers. He never did any thing by which any one even of His bitterest enemies suffered the least harm. The Spirit of Christ is not the spirit of intolerance. Where the truth of Christ prevails all persecutions stop. The apostolic Christians had the truth of the Gospel and they were persecuted, but they persecuted no man, but when the truth was lost and error prevailed then intolerance reared its head and persecutions among Christians began. Therefore we should learn from this text to watch with great diligence that we have and preserve the pure teaching of the Gospel, and that we strive to live up to it. If infidels and lib-

eralists ridicule us and call us bigots for holding so closely to the Bible this should be a strong comfort unto us, because the Lord foretold, so His disciples would fare, and because He has promised us great reward, saying: "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." Matt. 5, 11.

As a householder is to "bring forth out of his treasure things new and old," Matt. 13, 52, I thought it not amiss to-day to speak of this opinion which sounds so well to the carnal ear and is peddled under the garb of liberality or even charity. That would indeed be a very convenient kind of religion, allowing every man to make his own creed and to use it for a soft pillow, persuading himself that he is sincere in his faith and nothing more would be required of him. That would leave the Bible pretty much out in the cold, and we should beware of so convenient a kind of religion. Where it prevails it will certainly cause the churches to be deserted, at least those in which the Gospel of Christ is preached right.

God has given us His Word in which He tells us who our Savior is and what we must believe in order to be saved, and He has commanded us to search the Scriptures, because in them we have eternal life. This Word and it alone is to be the guide and rule of our faith. Let us not be so foolish as blindly and carelessly to adopt what everybody believes, or what this and that man says. In all that we believe we should make sure that this Book says it, and whatever it says we should believe in all sincerity of heart and soul. Then shall we know the Father and the Son and have eternal life, even as the Son says unto the Father: "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Amen.

PENTECOST.

FIRST SERMON.

TEXT: Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not, keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe. Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence. John 14, 23-31.

Pentecost marks the finishing act of God's counsel for the redemption and salvation of man. When dying on the cross Christ had already finished His work. He had made full satisfaction to Divine justice for the children of Adam. By His suffering and death sin was atoned for, and by raising Him from the dead and exalting Him to glory at His own right hand, God the Father acknowledged that the work of redemption was performed to His satisfaction. When the Father crowned the Son of man with glory and majesty, this act demonstrated that the Father is reconciled to man, whose substitute and representative Christ was. But, though God was reconciled to the world, men were not yet reconciled to God. Exalting Christ to glory God had declared that He on His part was reconciled to man, but in order that men might enjoy the fruits of this reconciliation it was yet necessary that men, on their part, be reconciled to God. It was necessary that the recon-

ciliation effected in Jesus Christ should be brought to the knowledge of men, and they should be induced to accept, appropriate and appreciate this reconciliation. In other words: After the work of redemption was completed, it yet remained that the Word of reconciliation be preached to the world, and that men be persuaded to accept this reconciliation and to reap its everlasting blessings. And to effect this the Holy Ghost was sent.

When the supper was prepared it yet remained for the Housefather to send messengers to communicate the fact, to invite the guests and to persuade them to come to His supper. Without the Holy Ghost this would not have been effected. Would the Gospel have been preached among all nations? Nay; for before they were filled with the Holy Ghost the disciples did not preach in the name of Christ crucified, they hid behind locked doors, and in public places they did not dare to speak the name of Jesus above a whisper. And even if the apostles would have preached the Gospel, if not the Holy Ghost had come to bear witness in and through their word, no man would have received it. To this Paul plainly testifies, writing in the 2d chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians: "The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." If the Holy Ghost had not come to work on and in the hearts of men through the Word preached by the apostles, no man would have received their word. The Jew would have spurned it as blasphemy, and the Greek would have held it in derision as foolishness. But now the Holy Ghost works through the Word of the cross. By the law He breaks the hardness of the natural heart, and by the Gospel He teaches men and persuades them to believe in Christ crucified, the power of God and the wisdom of God. Therefore St. Paul writes in the 3d chapter of 1 Corinthians, "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." Paul commenced preaching the Gospel at Corinth, Apollos continued it, but neither Paul nor Apollos converted the Corinthians; it was the Holy Ghost who made the Word effectual in their hearts and converted them

from the worship of dumb idols to the living God. Therefore Paul, in the same connection, tells the Corinthians, "Ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building."

Beautifully does the church-father Gregory speak of it in this language: "Preachers are external teachers, the Holy Spirit is the internal teacher. Without this internal teacher preachers may cry out, but they cannot convert men to God, the Holy Spirit must impress the Word on the hearts." In vain were all preaching, if the Holy Ghost did not teach the heart of the hearers to know and to appropriate the salvation of God. If you see in the Gospel of Christ the wisdom of God unto salvation, if your heart finds peace and comfort in it, you shall know that it is not of the preacher, neither of yourselves, but it is the work of the Holy Ghost in you; for He it is alone who kindles faith and creates the love of Christ in the heart, teaches it to know spiritual things spiritually, and bringing to remembrance the words of Jesus, fills the soul with peace and comfort. After God has been reconciled to men by the sacrifice of Christ, the Holy Ghost is sent to reconcile men to God, making them partakers of salvation in Christ. And this He accomplishes by means of the Word and the Sacraments, as the Lord here declares, saying: "*He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.*" Therefore we should be grateful unto the Lord, because after going to the Father He sent the Holy Ghost, and whenever we occupy ourselves with the Word our prayer should be that this heavenly Teacher be granted us. Under His guidance let us briefly consider the latter part of this Gospel, in which the Lord presents:

TWO REASONS, WHY THE DISCIPLES SHOULD NOT SORROW,
BUT REJOICE OVER HIS GOING TO THE FATHER.

- I. Because "My Father is greater than I;" and
- II. Because "the prince of this world hath nothing in Me."

I.

The four last verses of this text do not treat directly of the sending and the office of the Holy Ghost, for which reason they

are generally not so fully explained in Pentecost sermons. They are however an important part of that Word which the Holy Ghost is sent to bring to remembrance and, therefore, they are justly included in this text. Besides this, there are several things in these words which to many appear hard to understand, but which, when rightly understood, are highly comforting. For this reason I thought it not unjustifiable, to-day to speak on them in particular.

The chief object of the Lord's conversation with the disciples in the night in which He was betrayed, was, to secure them against taking offence at His great humiliation in His suffering and death, and to strengthen their faith; and indeed, there is no other extract of the Scriptures which could afford stronger comfort against offence in the cross of Christ, than this last sermon of the Lord. The subject of which He speaks is His going to the Father, comprising His suffering, death, resurrection and all His great deeds for our redemption and justification. Now when the disciples heard that He was going away their hearts were filled with sorrow, and to comfort them, the Lord sought to teach them the true meaning of His going to the Father. In the first part of this Gospel He tells them, if they would continue in His Word, He and the Father would come and would make their abode with them, and He would send them the Holy Ghost who would teach them rightly to understand His words and His works, and who would fill their hearts with the peace of God. Then He continues: "*Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you.*" These words indicated that He was about to tell them of still other benefits which His going to the Father would bring them.

The first which the Lord tells them is this: "*If ye loved me ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I.*" Did the disciples not love the Lord? Certainly they did; but their love was not pure as it ought to have been, it was tarnished with great defects. Their love was not the right godly, but rather a carnal love. A great factor in their love was the opinion that Christ would make the Jews a great and glorious nation in the world, and that they, His dis-

ciples, would be great lords on earth. They did not yet love Him solely, because by suffering and death He redeemed their souls from sin; this they did not yet fully understand; they loved Him hoping temporal advantages from Him. Therefore the Lord spake as though they did not love Him at all, because in a great measure their love was yet carnal and selfish. Of charity Paul says: "Charity seeketh not her own." 1 Cor. 13, 5. True love does not seek one's own advantage, but the advantage of the loved one, whereas carnal love seeks its own gain. If I truly love a person I will rejoice over that person's prosperity and happiness, although to me it brings no gain whatever; but if I love a person because I hope to gain advantage from that person, that is only a selfish love. Therefore the Lord here means to tell the disciples, if they loved Him as they ought, they would not regard their own gain or loss, but would rejoice, because He was now to be glorified with the Father, and glorified with the Father He would send them the Comforter and taught by the Comforter, they would love Him with a pure love, and His going away over which they now sorrowed would then be their rejoicing.

"*If ye loved me,*" the Lord would be constrained to say to many in our day, who profess to love Him, but are prompted by selfish motives. The love which has an eye to temporal blessings is a carnal, selfish love, of which the Lord says: "*If ye loved me.*" We should love Christ for His own sake, because He is so good, kind, gracious a Lord who gave Himself for us when there was neither merit nor worthiness in us. Our love for Christ is to be of such a nature that, considering His sacrifice, we are constrained to say with the poet:

Then why, O blessed Savior, Christ,
Should I not love Thee well?
Not for the hope of winning heav'n,
Nor of escaping hell;
Nor with the hope of gaining aught,
Not seeking a reward;
But solely for Thy love to me,
My ever-loving Lord.

This love no man can have of Himself. Even the noblest love of the natural man is always adulterated with selfishness. The Holy Ghost must create this love in the heart. Therefore we should diligently consider the great deeds comprised in Christ's going to the Father; for through the remembrance of these the Holy Ghost draws us to love Christ for His own sake, thus purifying our love and enabling us to rejoice over Christ's going to the Father, for the reason which He assigns: "*For my Father is greater than I.*"

How is the Father greater than Christ? Does He not say: "I and the Father are one"? John 10, 30. And again: "All things that the Father hath are mine"? John 16, 15. Do we not confess in the Athanasian Symbol: "And in this Trinity none is afore, or after the other; none is greater or less than another!" Yes, truly, so we believe; but in the same Symbol we also confess of Christ: "Equal to the Father, as touching His Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching His humanity." Even if the Lord had spoken these words in reference to His person, yet the Antitrinitarians could by no means prove their doctrine from them, because according to His humanity Christ was certainly inferior to the Father. But it is clear that He spake these words not in reference to His person, but in reference to His estate and office; for He is here speaking of His going to the Father, hence of the exercising of His office. From this connection it is clear that He means to say: My Father, with whom I am One in Divine nature, is greater than ye, now in my estate of humiliation, see in me; for now I walk in the form of a servant, despised and mocked, but I shall not remain in this lowly estate; I am going to the Father, and He will glorify me with the glory which I had before the world began, and I will sit in majesty to govern my church and to rule in the midst of mine enemies.

Luther says of these words: "The Father was greater than He, not according to the nature of the two persons, but according to government and majesty." This explanation preserves the words in their connection, and that it faithfully expresses the Lord's meaning is established by the prayer with which He

concluded that memorable conversation when He, addressing the Father, says: "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." John 17, 4. Not with another, with the same glory was He glorified which He had with the Father before the creation. The Son was made flesh and in it He humbled Himself, becoming the lowliest of the low; but when He had finished his work the Father glorified Him in His humanity with the Divine glory which He had from eternity, co-equal with the Father. Very soon was this demonstrated to the disciples; for that night He went away bound, and after His resurrection He returned glorified. But especially at Pentecost did the Holy Ghost glorify Him in their hearts, enlightening their eyes to see both the majesty of His power and the greatness of His work.

Similarly He still behaves Himself to us-ward. Sometimes He appears to depart from us, leaving us, as it were, comfortless; but He stays not away. He comes again, as He promised, saying: "In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee," Is. 54, 8, and when He returns He returns glorified. Therefore in the day of affliction we should believe, as He here bids us: "*And now I have told you before it come to pass, that when it has come to pass, ye might believe.*" The faith of the disciples had to undergo a hard probation, but by it their faith was purified and increased. When the Lord appears to depart from us with His comfortings, we should not faint; He cannot stay away, He comes again and causes His glory to shine more brightly in the heart than before.

II.

Cheerfully should we endure temptations, considering the words of the Lord: "*Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.*" These words sound strange, but they are glorious words. He says, this would be their last conversation; the time was at hand

when they must part, because the prince of this world was coming upon Him. The prince of this world is Satan, whose kingdom is sin and whom the world serves. This prince, says Christ, was coming upon Him; therefore He could no more talk much with the disciples. Satan was the chief enemy of Christ and at various times already had he come, seeking to destroy the Lord; but he had failed, because Christ's hour had not yet come. But now the time was at hand when the Lord was to say to His enemies: "This is your hour and the power of darkness." Luke 22, 53. Now Satan had found a willing tool in one of the disciples, in Judas. Through him he was to succeed and yet not succeed, but succeeding in his design, he was to succeed only in overthrowing his own kingdom. Satan entered into Judas, and by Judas the Lord came into the hands of His enemies who, by the instigation of Satan, delivered Him to be crucified. In the capture, trial and execution of Christ men were the actors, but Satan was the mover and instigator.

How, then, can the Lord here say of Satan: "*The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me,*" when Satan succeeded in bringing the Lord into a shameful and painful death? In this Satan did succeed, but only to his own overthrow; for the result showed that he gained nothing, but lost all by the Lord's death.

What did Satan seek in Christ? Why, he sought sin, which he loves and always seeks. Now Satan did find sin in Christ, and on account of that sin he had a claim on Christ, because, according to law and justice, the wages of sin is death. Had there been no sin in Christ, Satan would have had no claim on Him, but because there was sin in Christ, the devil did not rest until he had brought Him into death. So far all looked well for Satan's side, but he made a mistake and this mistake proved fatal to him. The sin which was in Christ was not sin which He had committed, but sin which I and you committed, which Christ, our security-man, had taken upon Himself. Yet in so far it made no difference where this sin came from, it was there in Christ and deserved death, and Satan through his agents brought about death. But because those sins for which Satan

brought Christ into death were not committed by Christ Himself, therefore the outcome was: in the first place, that Satan could not hold Christ in death, and in the second place, that he forfeited his claim on those for whose sins he had brought Christ into the grave, and now the devil has no more right and power to claim my soul for death. So the prince of this world came upon Christ with great eagerness to make a prey of Him, but He found nothing in Christ save only great loss and injury to himself and his kingdom. This is the sublime and yet so simple counsel of God for our deliverance from the power of Satan.

Yet the disciples might have said to Christ: How canst Thou say that Satan will have nothing in Thee, when he will bring Thee into death? Therefore the Lord immediately adds: "*But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence.*" As though He would say: I die, not because I must, but I give myself into the power of the devil from love to sinners and obedience towards my Father whose will it is that thus I should bruise the head of the Old Serpent and should redeem the human race.

And now, let us arise and depart from the regions of unbelief and go hence into the domain of faith. This thing has come to pass: Satan did bring Christ into death for our sins and thereby he forfeited his right to drag us into death for them. He that believes this must, indeed, also die, but his death is no more a punishment for his sins, it is rather a means to free him altogether from sin. Do not say: If I could only believe this, but mark the words which I have spoken. They are the words of Divine truth, and pray the Lord to grant you the heavenly Comforter, knowing that your prayer cannot be in vain, because the Lord has promised to send Him and has said: "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him." Luke 11, 13. Amen.

PENTECOST.

SECOND SERMON.

TEXT: For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not, is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God. John 3, 16-21.

In the 72d Psalm it was prophesied of Christ: "In his days shall the righteous flourish: and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth."

The Psalmist foresaw the kingdom of Christ spread over all lands and the isles of the sea. And this kingdom was to know no overthrow, but to endure through all generations as long as the moon would last. There was a time when it appeared as thought this prophecy should fail. It was the time when Jesus Christ had finished His work on earth and had returned to the Father, but had not yet sent the Comforter. Then there were, in the calculation of men, certainly very slender prospects that His kingdom would endure and would be spread abroad over the whole earth. His people had rejected Him and nothing was left Him save a dozen or so of timid men full of fear and trembling. Jesus had been shamefully put to death, and His disciples, though they still believed in Him, hastened along the streets of Jerusalem with hurried and cautious steps and when they met together, they kept the doors locked. What prospect was there that these timid men would perpetuate and spread abroad the

kingdom of Christ? Surely, in the judgment of reason there was an end of Christ and no hope for His kingdom.

But it does not follow that what is weak in the sight of man is rejected of God, but, rather, God chooses that which the proud despise. It was with the kingdom of Christ as the Psalm already quoted says: "There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon." This handful of corn denoted the disciples. Now you know, corn which is to grow must first be hid out of sight in the ground, but sunshine and rain will draw it forth and soon it will form large stalks with spreading leaves and many grains. After the Lord's crucifixion the disciples were, so to say, buried; they were forgotten. That mighty city, Jerusalem, was busy making money and seeking pleasure, and who thought of those poor fishermen, who had followed Jesus of Nazareth? But as a warm shower will cause a newly planted cornfield to become green, so, when the day of Pentecost was come, the heavenly shower of the Spirit of light and zeal and life falling upon the disciples caused them to step forth out of their seclusion to the amazement of Jerusalem, and now the fruit of this handful of corn began to shake like Lebanon and the shock, beginning at Jerusalem, spread to the surrounding countries, extended over the face of the earth and endures to this day; for the disciples spake with fiery tongues that their words penetrated the hearts of men like sparks of fire, and they spake in all languages, because the kingdom of Christ was to spread among all nations. Yes, the rejected, the despised Jesus of Nazareth had a handful of corn in the earth, and He sent His Spirit to make it swell and grow, and the handful of corn became a living seed which has turned the earth into an abundant harvest field. At this day there is golden corn ripening even at the uttermost sea.

Thus is described the gift bestowed on the day of Pentecost: the Spirit of Christ, who has founded, enlarged and preserved the Christian church, and who will continue to enlarge and preserve Christ's kingdom until the stars drop from the firmament and the sun shall lose his glory. By what means the Spirit accomplishes this work we learn from the effect of Peter's ser-

mon on the day of Pentecost. The multitude wonderingly exclaimed: "We do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God." That is the work of the Spirit. He causes the wonderful works of God in Jesus Christ to be preached on earth and through the preaching of Christ He calls men, gathers a church and sanctifies and preserves it in the true faith. Therefore this Gospel is a very proper Pentecost text, although the Holy Ghost is not mentioned in it. In beautiful language does it speak of the love of God which the Holy Ghost is sent to shed abroad in the hearts of men. Agreeably to the text let us consider:

THE LOVE OF GOD MANIFESTED IN THE SENDING OF JESUS
CHRIST; noticing

- I. The greatness of that love; and
- II. Unto what it should persuade us.

I.

"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." Here we hear, whence our redemption springs: from the heart of God. Before the foundation of the world, in His eternal counsel, the Triune God resolved to redeem our fallen race. What persuaded God to form this glorious resolution? Was it our great worth and merit? Why, before the foundations of the world were laid, when there were no mountains and no hills, when the firmament was not spanned, when time was not and no seraph chanted Allelujah before Jehovah's throne, then it was that God resolved to redeem us. Were we worthy thereof? Had we merited His favor? O, we were not in existence. And when God had created man, when He had given Him a wonderfully formed body and had breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; when He had made him lord over the earth and all that therein is, and man repaid His goodness with disobedience and deserted to the enemy, what hindered God from instantly hurling man down to the bottomless pit and erasing his remembrance from the heavens? What moved Him to have compassion on us? Was He in need of us? Would He, banishing man, per-

haps not have had enough creatures to honor and praise Him and to do His commands? Is He not the Almighty One who can do whatsoever He pleases? Was it not He that said: "Let there be light; and there was light"? of whom David sings: "He spake and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast"? Ps. 33, 9. Has He not ten thousand times ten thousand holy angels who cry unto Him: "Holy, holy, holy," and who do His commands? Is He not the Sovereign One who stands in need of nothing, who is indebted to none, who alone grants and preserves life and being to all? And what is man? Dust and ashes, a fading flower, a fleeting shadow! "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" Ps. 8, 4. Surely, not because He stood in need of us, or because He could otherwise not have filled heaven with holy creatures, did God resolve to restore our fallen race. What moved God to redeem us? Was it, perhaps, because God Himself had been the cause of man's falling into sin? He is "not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness," Ps. 5, 4, neither can evil dwell with Him. Had He not solemnly warned man against eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? And did not man nevertheless do it against the will and command of God? God is good. He had no part in the fall of man. In our text the Lord tells us what persuaded God to redeem man: "GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD." O, a sweet, a glorious word! God is not a spiteful tyrant; He has no pleasure in afflicting and destroying; from eternity *love* dwells in His heart.

What does God love? Does He love His Son who is the brightness of His glory? Does He love the angels who exalt Him and do His commands? Truly God does love these. But more: "*God so loved the world.*" We love our relatives and friends who love us and show kindness unto us: God loves His enemies who hate and insult Him. Men render Him evil for good, yet He loves them. He is holy, they are unholy and sinners; He loves them still. But mark well: God does not love sin which is in man, He hates sin, He loves man who is still His creature, though deprived of his original glory by the wiles of Satan. This love of God is something incomprehensible

to us. God creates man, but he despises his Creator and making unto himself an idol of wood or stone kneels to worship it; yet God loves this miserable traitor. Comprehend it who can. "God first loved us," says St. John; He who is so great loved us who are so altogether nothing and so perverse.

How does God love the world? What is the measure of His love? is it great or small? Does God so love the world as to support it in His hand like a ball that it may not sink and perish? so, as to adorn it with flowery shrubs and manifold plants? so, as to moisten it with rain, to warm it with sunshine and to make it to give seed to the sower and bread to the eater? God does all this. He preserves, refreshes, gladdens all His creatures, also those that are evil; but His love goes much farther, it is far greater: "*God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.*" So God loved the world that He gave His Son for it, not one of many, but the only one He had. And how did He give Him? Did He make Him a great Lord in this world, to enjoy its treasures and pleasures? Not even so much of this earth did the Father give Him that He had where to lay His head. So God gave His Son that He was born in a stable and bedded in a manger, that He hungered and thirsted and wandered about in poverty and misery, that slaves spat Him in the face and He died the death of an outlaw in the company of outlaws. And is this love? "God," says St. Paul, "commendeth his love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Rom. 5, 8. That is the measure of God's love. Where was ever such a thing heard of that a father of his own free will relinquished his only son to a painful death in order to save his enemies from death? The world was God's enemy; all the imagination of man's heart tended only to insult God and to dishonor His name; yet God gave His Son for these His enemies, although He knew that they would take Him and would hang Him on the shameful tree. When Moses considered what God had done for Israel he exclaimed: "Yea, He loved the people." Deut. 33, 3. If we consider what God did for the world notwithstanding its wickedness, we must much rather exclaim: Yea, He loved the world.

And what end had the love of God in view? For what purpose did God give His Son? "*That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*" This is the object of God's love, to save us; unto this end was the Son of God given, that we should not perish. We are not to languish in hell, we are to become inhabitants of heaven.

And how many does this love of God comprise? Who are those whom God so loves that He would make them inhabitants of heaven? Is it the great men of the earth, the rich, the honorable, the pious? Is it the wise, the polished, the civilized? Is it a select few and are the rest excluded? It is the rich and the poor, the wise and the unwise, the polished and the barbarian. With God there is no respect of person that He should have sent His Son for the genteel European, but not for the deformed Australian. "*God so loved THE WORLD.*" And again: "*God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that THE WORLD through him might be saved.*" His love encompasses the world, and not in one generation only, but in all generations. What does the word *world* mean? It does here not mean the universe. God did not give His Son for rocks and rills, plants and animals. The Son of God became man to save men, and when He says *world* He means to comprise all men. He uses a figure of speech saying *world* for *men*, in order to emphasize that all are comprised. If He had said, *God so loved men*, then one might say, it could not include those who live in the world like beasts and not like men; He says *world*, so that there can be no question about its comprising the whole human race without exceptions, every one in the world. The cannibals are also in the world. The word *world* comprises every creature having an immortal soul that ever was, or is, or will be on earth. He who numbers the hairs of our head, saw every one who ever would be on earth, and He said: For these will I give my Son.

This is a comforting word for you and for me. If we were outside of the world then this glorious fact that God loved the world would not concern us; but we are in the world, and there can be no question, God loves us and gave His Son that we should not be condemned, but should obtain everlasting life.

This we are to believe and not to doubt, and to believe it this same love of God should persuade us.

II.

Because God so loved us that He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us, He is surely a Lord in whom we should confide, whom we should trust. He loves us, and we should never doubt His love, but rest assured that in all things He desires to seek our good.

Moreover, the very object of Christ's mission is faith. "*God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, THAT WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH IN HIM.*" God sent His Son for this end and object that we should believe in Him. That Jesus Christ came for this purpose all His words and all His works testify unto us. What He did and what He spake was for this purpose that all people should believe on Him. He distinctly testifies to the Jews in John chapter 10th, saying: "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him." This is the object both of His words and of His works, that we should believe on Him. Even so all the sermons of the apostles were for this object: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," and for this same purpose were the Gospels written; as John testifies: "These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." Ch. 20, 31. This is the object of the coming of Christ; this is the object of His whole work; this is the object for which the Scriptures are given that we should believe. O a sweet and precious fact! Jesus Christ is come in order that we should believe in Him. Sometimes we are faint-hearted and say: Dare I claim Christ for my own? will He be mine who am so unworthy? will He dwell in a soiled heart? So we often despondingly think, but those are wrong thoughts of the perverse old Adam; for Jesus Christ is come that we sinful mortals should believe in Him. We are not only *allowed* to believe, it is His will that we should believe in Him. The more closely we press Him to our heart, the more firmly we hold Him,

the more determined we say: "I will not let Thee go," the more are we doing that for which He is come.

Likewise, the final object of Christ's coming should draw us unto faith: "*God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, SHOULD NOT PERISH, BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE.*" Through faith in Christ we are to escape death and to have life. We were lost; the sentence of death had long since been passed on us in the words: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." And that no one might think, that this sentence concerned Adam alone and not his posterity, Moses repeated the same threat in other words, saying: "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them." Deut. 27, 26. Thereby the sentence was passed on us that, after a short stay on this earth, we must go to the place of destruction. But before this sentence was executed, the Son of God intervened. He became a curse for us and so delivered us from the curse of the law, and now in the Gospel comes the message to us: "*Whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.*" Should we not believe this message? Should not a condemned criminal believe the message of pardon sent by the governor? Why are we so slow to believe? Alas! it is our own perverse heart that retards us. Our heart knows it; our conscience convinces us; we cannot deny, but must acknowledge that we deserve damnation. There is not one in this house who does not deserve banishment from the countenance of the Lord; for every one of us has "come short of the glory of God." According to right and justice we all belong to the place of destruction. Nevertheless we are not to go there. The Son of God is come in order that we should not perish. Believe it, believe it, and doubt ye not; "*for God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.*"

O, those are lovely words! Surely, every one should know them by heart, to have them ready for use at all times. Satan is ever busy and our own perverse heart is always inclined to

picture Christ unto us as a stern judge whom we must in some way reconcile unto ourselves; and that is utterly false. Christ is not come as a judge to judge us, but as a Savior to save us. At the end of days He will judge the world; for the Father has ordained Him the judge; but now He is our Savior and not our judge. If your own heart would picture Christ to you as a judge who is angry with you, remember these words: "GOD SENT NOT HIS SON INTO THE WORLD TO CONDEMN THE WORLD." On another occasion Christ said: "I judge no man." In John chapter 12th, He even declares unto the Jews: "If any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I am not come to judge the world, but to save the world." Even those who do not believe His Word, He does not judge, because He is not come to judge, but to save. How could He express in stronger terms that He does not want to be judge over us? He judges no one, not even His enemies; for He is not a judge come to condemn, He is a Savior come to save.

Shall then the unbelieving not be judged? Surely they shall be, or rather are judged and condemned already, but Christ does not judge them. He is the good Shepherd who seeks their souls, the Advocate who pleads with the Father for all men. By whom the unbelieving are judged Christ tells the Jews in John, chapter 5th, saying: "Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses." The unbelieving have their accuser and judge, but that judge is not Christ. Christ is no accuser, He accuses and judges no one. We must never picture Christ to ourselves as demanding that we must be so and so holy, or must have done many good works before we could have part in Him. He does not accuse us, He demands nothing of us, He is come to save us. O what a blessed thing to have the right knowledge of Jesus Christ! He is come into the world for no other purpose at all than to be a Savior. He died for you when you were yet His enemies; He prepared salvation for you before you were born; He demands nothing of you; He does not even ask what you are and what you have done; He wants to save you. O banish doubt and believe. It is a saying true and faithful. Here it is black on white, plain as plain can

be: He is come into the world, "*not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.*"

What has been said is also an explanation of the words following: "*He that believeth on him, is not condemned: but he that believeth not, is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*" They that believe in Christ are not judged or condemned, neither in this world nor in the world to come. For the believers there is no judgment. Because they appropriate Christ's righteousness, therefore in the resurrection they will come forth clothed with righteousness, and they will not be brought into judgment, but together with Christ they will sit in judgment over the world. But they that believe not in Christ are judged already. Christ does indeed not sit in judgment over them; He seeks to draw them unto Himself and to save them; but because they have not the righteousness of Christ they are still under Moses who has long since pronounced the sentence of death on them, and the judgment of the last day will only be the manifestation of the fact that they are yet in their sins.

These two—Judge and Savior—we must by all means distinguish well. Moses in his law is a judge. He says, we must keep the law, or we must be damned. Moses accuses, judges and condemns us, and he does so justly, because we have not kept the law. Therefore Moses is right when he says that we are condemned. But Jesus Christ is not come to accuse and to judge, but to deliver and to save us from the sentence of Moses. His name is the shield which averts the curse of Moses from our heads. Therefore whenever the law accuses us, we should run from Moses to Christ, seeking shelter under His name, and this we should do with boldness, because Christ is come for this very same purpose to save us from the curse. Blessed be His Name now and forever. Amen.

Abide, O faithful Savior,
Among us with Thy love.
Grant steadfastness, and help us
To reach our home above.

TRINITY.

TEXT: There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh, is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.—John 3, 1-15.

Many have been the religions which have started up among men since the world began, and every one of them claims to show the way to heaven, the way how man, the sinner, may be united with God and eternally saved. But that alone can be the right and true way which God has Himself prepared and which He has revealed to men. Man is fallible, God infallible. The opinions, doctrines and theories which men devise and advance can not be otherwise than uncertain, fallible and deceptive, alone what God says is infallibly and immutably true. The theories and doctrines of men change with the times, but God remains the same and His words abide forever.

And as there is but one God there is only one way to salvation. The ways devised by man's own wisdom do not lead to heaven. However far man may advance in earthly knowledge, yet by reason of the corruption which is in his very nature he is blind in spiritual things and the ways which he devises can only lead the soul into error and destruction. Among man-made religions some may be founded on better principles and may be less debasing than others, but not one of them can show a safe and reliable way to heaven; they all leave the mind

Bewildered in a doubtful road.

God's Word alone leads the soul unto truth and salvation.

To escape error and destruction we must avoid all teachings of men which are not in agreement with the revealed Word of God, remembering that human theories, however plausible and attractive they may appear, are at best only uncertain speculations, but the Word which has proceeded from the mouth of the Lord is unerring truth. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Is. 8, 20. With the Bible in hand we must say: 'This Book is God's own Word. It alone shall be the rule and standard of my faith. Whatever is not in agreement with the words of this Book, that I will reject no matter who teaches it; and whatever the words of this Book say, that I will accept though all the wise and mighty of the earth cry out against it.' The written Word of God is to be the law-book by which we prove and judge all things, whether they be right or wrong, true or false, good or bad. Ever should we be ready with heart and soul to join in with the poet when he sings:

The various ways that men devise
To shake my faith with treach'rous art,
I scorn as vanities and lies,
And bind Thy Gospel to my heart.

What then is the way of salvation which is laid down in the Bible? In our text we are told of a man who came to Jesus

with this same inquiry in his heart, eager to learn the true way unto salvation. Nicodemus did not have the courage to come to Jesus openly, but so great was his confidence in Jesus and so strong his desire to know the truth that he came by night, and the Lord did not refuse him, as He refuses none if he will but come. Jesus did not tell Nicodemus, if he was ashamed to come to Him in the daytime He would have nothing to do with him; He received Nicodemus with great kindness and gave him the desired information. And what was the chief truth which He told Nicodemus? It was this: To enter the kingdom of heaven he must be born again and must become a new man from heart, mind, soul and sentiment. Allow me therefore to speak of

THE NEW BIRTH.

Let me show

- I. The necessity of the new birth;
- II. The means through which it is effected;
- III. The mysteriousness of this work of the Spirit; and
- IV. That there is no reason to be offended in this doctrine.

I.

Coming to Jesus Nicodemus said unto Him: "*Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.*" From the miracles of Jesus it was evident to Nicodemus that this Jesus was of God, and when Nicodemus calls Him "*a teacher come from God,*" he indicates what he desired to learn from the Lord. From this *teacher come from God* Nicodemus desired to learn the *way to come to God*. Therefore Jesus did not wait for Nicodemus to make a long speech; knowing for what he had come He at once proceeded to show him the way, saying: "*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*" Jesus did not take a round-about course, He forthwith in clear and strong words told this man what he had come to learn. The way into the kingdom of heaven is by the new birth, by being born again, and other way there is none. To enter the kingdom of heaven, a man must be

born again, and any one not born again cannot enter the kingdom of God.

The new birth is indispensably, absolutely necessary unto salvation. If you are to enter heaven you must be born again, and if you are not born again you will not enter heaven. The only one way to enter the kingdom of God is by being born again. Here there are no exceptions. Let a person be who and what he will: rich or poor, wise or unwise, good or bad, stooping under the burden of eighty winters or an infant in the cradle, every one born once must be born again, or remain excluded from the kingdom of God.

Do you ask me: What proof have you for this sweeping assertion? Proof? Do you want proof for it that there is no other way into the kingdom of God than by the new birth? I expect to offer no argumentation at all in proof of this. It is a thing which needs no proof by argumentation. Here is the proof: "*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*" The Lord says it and He affirms it with a double solemn affirmation. Need I prove what the Lord says? Here are His words clear and strong, and if any man thinks to attain to heaven without being born again he is flatly contradicting the Lord and will find himself sadly mistaken. With us Christians the Lord's saying so ends all dispute; for what the Lord says that is so, and it is so because He says so.

Yet this text itself contains a clear illustration of the Lord's words, and the Lord Himself produces an argument to convince Nicodemus. The fact that the Lord addressed these words to Nicodemus illustrates that even the best, the most moral and virtuous cannot enter the kingdom of God unless they are born again. Nicodemus was educated and well versed in the Scriptures, and there can be no doubt whatever but that he also walked in the law, living morally and righteously. Nevertheless the Lord said unto him, he must be born again, which implies that by his keeping the law and his works of piety he could not be saved. We all know there is this difference amongst men in their natural, unconverted condition that some live morally, some

viciously. But we must not make such a distinction as to think, the servants of vice needed to be born again while those living externally moral did not; for the Lord spake these words to a man who lived very morally. This was the very reason why the Pharisees could not enter the kingdom of God, because they depended for righteousness before God on their civil morality and good works. If a man could gain heaven by his morality he would need no savior at all. Both the virtuous and the vicious must be born again.

But many, while conceding that all grown persons must be born again, would except infants, arguing that these need not be born again, because they are innocent and have no sin. Others contend that children are not held accountable under a certain age, although these frequently differ among themselves as to the line of accountability. Still others think, infants need not be born again, because the kingdom of God belongs to them by virtue of their birth from Christian parents. But the Lord makes no such exceptions. He says straightforward: "*Except a man,*" that is: "*Except any one be born again,*" which is certainly saying: He that has been born *once* must be born *again*, and no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born a second time. And when Nicodemus, understanding it of bodily birth, expressed his surprise at this, the Lord affirmed it once more, saying: "*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*" That is clear: Whatsoever is born of the flesh is flesh. All those born of sinful parents are sinful and must be born again, born from above, born of God spiritually before they are fitted for the kingdom of God. A crab sprout is of the crab nature, and cannot become a good tree fit for the orchard unless it is budded or grafted. So these words of the Lord comprise the whole human family together in one lump and affirm that the entire family is flesh, and not a single member of it can get to heaven without being born again, as the apostle also asserts that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." 1 Cor. 15, 50. No one read-

ing these words with an unprejudiced mind will undertake to deny this.

But a great many people look at this matter through the colored spectacles of carnal reason, of prejudice and preconceived opinions, and they argue: How can water do this great thing? or: What is the use of baptizing an infant which has not even the use of its reason? These questions refer to the means through which the new birth is effected and of which the Lord here says: "*Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*"

II.

It is not my object to-day to discourse on the means of grace in general or to present the doctrine thereof in full, I only desire to draw attention to this particular point, that the means of grace are such means through which God acts and bestows His gifts, and not such means through which man acts and secures for himself the gifts of God. Many understand by means of grace such things in which man acts and procures for himself God's grace and gifts, wherefore they will speak of prayer, charity, giving alms and the like, as being means of grace. About a year ago a man with whom I casually met on a journey said to me: "Regeneration is brought about by the mind of man working together with the Spirit of God." He regarded regeneration the joint work of the human mind and the Holy Ghost, an opinion very common in our days. To all those entertaining this idea that conversion or the new birth is brought about by the mind of man working together with the Spirit of God, to them prayers, struggles and good works must appear the chief means of grace, because in these man acts, and baptism they either reject entirely, or they regard it only a ceremony, a mere formality which could effect nothing unto the new birth. Were it true that regeneration is the joint work of the mind of man and the Spirit of God, then all children would be excluded from salvation. Unable to work with their mind children could not be born again, and here the Lord says, any one not born again cannot enter the kingdom of God.

The new birth is solely and solidly the work of God. In the first chapter of John it is said of all believers: "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Of baptism specially St. Paul writes: "According to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Savior." Tit. 3, 5. This is clearly describing baptism as such a washing in which the Holy Ghost works the new birth. The new birth is also described in the Scriptures as a new creation. But creating is a divine work in which no man can co-operate.

Means of grace therefore, in the proper use of the term, are such ordinances in and through which God comes to men to perform His work in them and to bestow on them His spiritual gifts. They are rightly called the hands of God. It is the Holy Ghost who regenerates and new-creates man, and baptism is one of the means through which He performs this work. It is the ordinary medium by which men are made the children of God, as circumcision was with the Jews. The water of baptism, which is "comprehended in God's command and connected with God's Word," is streaked with the blood of Christ which cleanses us from all sin. O a blessed thing that the means of grace are not such ordinances in which we must act with our intellectual powers, seeking the gift of the Spirit, but such ordinances in which the Holy Ghost acts, bringing us all the treasures of Christ; for our works and doings are of no value and no account, but the Holy Ghost's work is of divine value and divine validity.

III.

"How can these things be?" The new birth is indeed a mysterious work which far transcends the comprehension of our reason. We can understand a reformation of morals, but a new birth is something very different, a work in man's innermost being. By the new birth man enters on an altogether new life of which he knew nothing before; new powers are created in him

which before he had not; new likes and dislikes arise in him so that he now loves what he formerly hated and hates what he formerly loved; a new faith and trust is engendered in him that, whilst his trust formerly was in the world, its honors and treasures, or in his own piety and good works, he now hopes in the mercy of the Father of Jesus Christ. In the new birth something new is created in man which was not in him before, as Paul writes to the Corinthians: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." 2 Cor. 5, 17. Like a child in its natural birth enters on a new and altogether different manner of life, so in spiritual birth the soul enters on a new and altogether different life, a life which cannot be observed with the bodily senses.

Mysterious is the manner in which this hidden life is created. To wondering Nicodemus the Lord said: "*The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.*" No man can bind the wind and make it blow, or cause it to blow in a certain direction; it blows where it lists and as it lists, east or west, north or south, in a strong volume, or in a mild zephyr. The Spirit of God is a free Spirit who cannot be bound. He blows where He lists, now in one land then in another, now on this woman then on that man. No man can do anything to oblige the Spirit to blow upon and new-create him. Let men devise methods to cause the Spirit to come upon and regenerate them, it is all like trying to bind the wind. Whatever methods men devise, whatever theories they construe they cannot bind the Spirit of God; for He is a free Spirit and will not be bound. What Christ here expresses by the comparison: "*The wind bloweth where it listeth,*" the same Paul expresses thus: "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Phil. 2, 13. The new birth does not originate from man's good pleasure; it is not occasioned by any thing which man can do; the new birth proceeds only and alone from the good pleasure of God, as Paul distinctly declares: "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him

that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." Rom. 9, 16. The Spirit blows when He lists and where He lists.

Even so His blowing is stronger or milder as He lists. Sometimes His blowing is so strong and brisk that a man knows the time of His arrival, as, for example, with that keeper of the prison who could tell the day and hour of his conversion. Sometimes the Spirit's blowing is so secret and mild that a man knows it not and only by and by becomes conscious thereof, as the Lord says in Mark, chap. 4: "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come." This too belongs to the freedom of the Spirit that on one He blows strongly from the outset, on another so secretly and mildly that he knows it not, and thereafter with astonishment finds the Spirit's work in him by the fruit growing up. So is the Spirit's secret work made manifest by the growing up of the fruit, "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Rom. 14, 17.

And as in the springing of the seed, so likewise in the growing up and maturing of the fruit there are mysterious things. "*And thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth.*" We may observe indications that the Spirit has His work in others, but when He began that work and how far He will carry it, or what fruit He will work in them and by them we know not. In ourselves we Christians experience the blowing of the Spirit often and in manifold ways. How is it that often, when we are in solitude or in sadness, a Scripture passage will suddenly come to our mind and comfort us? How is it that our soul is lifted up, and ready to sing psalms of praise, when everything is against us and it would appear to men that we must be crushed to the ground? How is it that sometimes in the midst of earthly success or in gay company, suddenly a feeling of sadness will come upon us,

or the most solemn thoughts of eternity will fill the soul? How is it that being nigh to despair perhaps one single word of the Scriptures will cause us to rejoice in hope? Behold, such are the blowings of the Spirit that we are often constrained to exclaim: Whence does this come? How long will it last? Where will it end? Mysterious things! Who can understand them?

Yea surely, the new birth and the new man are both a miracle. If a man, born into this world, lives for this world and from year to year becomes more and more enamored with the things of this world, that is nothing strange. Earth-born man is by nature earthly minded, and the whole tendency of his heart is to become continually more attached to earthly things; for he is born flesh of the flesh. But if a man is born again so that his heart is turned away from the things of this world, and the things of God are become his life, his love, his all, yes, that is something strange, that is the wonderful work of God. Truly, as many believing souls, so many miracles of God are walking the earth.

IV.

But we must not forget that wise lady Reason who always wants her say in spiritual things and is ready to reject them as absurd. A very few words will sufficiently indicate what folly it is to be offended at the doctrine of regeneration.

Can such a thing as a new birth be? Why should it not? If the new birth were to be man's work, or the very least part of it the work of man, then this question would be in place. Man is not almighty, neither is his skill infinite; his powers are limited. In regard to the work of men we are justified in asking: Is it possible for man to do it? How can it be, and how is it done? But God's power is not limited, nor His skill bounded. "Our God is in the heavens; He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased." Ps. 115, 3. Man does what he *can*, God does what He *pleases*. In regard to man's works the great question is in place: "*How can these things be?*" But in regard to God's works this question is out of place. The new birth is the work of the Spirit of God, the same who moved

upon the face of the waters at the creation. Even reason cannot deny that He who created man can also new-create him. And that the new birth can be effected by such simple means as baptism and the Word admits of no objections at all; for reason itself must confess that the Almighty can do great things by small means. When Moses struck the waters of the Red Sea with his staff unthinking men might have ridiculed it as a very foolish act, but the waters parted and stood like a wall, and Israel passed through on dry ground. God is almighty and not only can He do what He pleases, He has free choice of the means by which to accomplish His works. But against Nicodemus, who was reasoning from reason, the Lord does not stand on the defensive, He attacks reason in its own domain concerning its knowledge of natural things. Of the wind the Lord says: "*Thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth.*" What agencies, what conditions of the atmosphere caused the current of air which is now passing over this house? where did it start? when will it stop? If we must confess our ignorance in this and in so many other natural things which are subject to the research of reason, how should we presume to search out the secret works of Him of whom the 135th Psalm says: "He bringeth the wind out of his treasures."

In God there are things even more marvelous than the new birth; for to Nicodemus the Lord declared: "*If I have told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?*" He calls the new birth an earthly thing, because it is a work done here on earth and experienced by men, as distinguished from things in God and works done in heaven. And now He mentions such a heavenly thing, saying: "AND NO MAN HATH ASCENDED UP TO HEAVEN, BUT HE THAT CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN, EVEN THE SON OF MAN WHICH IS IN HEAVEN." The Son of man came down from heaven and yet did not vacate heaven; He was in heaven and yet He ascended up to heaven. And still another mystery He tells us: "AS MOSES LIFTED UP THE SERPENT IN THE WILDERNESS, EVEN SO MUST THE SON OF MAN BE LIFTED UP: THAT WHOSOEVER BE-

LIEVETH IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH, BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE." Because the Son of man was lifted up on the cross and ascended up to heaven, therefore we who believe in Him have eternal life and by virtue of His ascension we also ascend up into heaven. Because there are many things equally and far more incomprehensible than the new birth, there is certainly no cause to be offended at His words.

Thus this whole text from beginning to end is full of things which are beyond the comprehension of reason. But reason would like to see into these things. Nicodemus wanted to see through the manner and the *how* of the new birth. Man is an inquisitive creature; what he is not to know just that very thing he wants to know. Should we give way to this curiosity and try to solve God's mysteries? Many have attempted it and have furnished abundant proof of its being a foolhardy undertaking. In spring the south wind rises and the weather turns warm. Now suppose a farmer begins to study to find out all about that south wind, and finally he sets out to travel south to find out where that wind started and what makes it warm, would not that man be on a fool's errand? His neighbor takes the facts as they are and improves the warm weather to till his fields, to plant and sow, and in the fall he has a golden harvest to gather. Take the facts as God has made and revealed them and improve them unto your benefit, then you have the golden harvest of eternal life before you. Unto Nicodemus the Lord said: "*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen.*" The Lord knows the facts and these facts He testifies in His Word. His Word we are to receive in simplicity of heart. Then our faith rests on Divine facts, facts which are our salvation.

Such a fact the Lord here tells us in the words: "*Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*" The Lord testifies that in baptism the Holy Ghost regenerates us and makes us heirs of the kingdom of God, and should we dispute His testimony, asking: How can this thing be? With grateful hearts we should return thanks to God that He saves us, not by our works of righteousness, but from

mercy by the washing of regeneration through Jesus Christ. We must beware of over-curiosity in God's mysteries, lest our curiosity serve us like Eve's did her. If you have a plain word of God stand on it, then you have a foundation under your feet, and leave the Hows and Whys to God. If God has said a thing let that be sufficient unto you. On His Word we are to take our stand at all times, be our experiences glad or sad. And when we do experience the blowings of the Spirit, that He draws us to Christ, or prompts us to a good work, rebukes or comforts us, we should remember what the apostle commands the Thessalonians, saying: "Quench not the Spirit." 1 Ep. 5, 19. Resist not His promptings. If He prompts you to a good work, quench Him not, but go and do it; if He prompts you to prayer, quench Him not, but make your supplications known unto God. Knowing that He is a free Spirit we must not presume to prescribe to Him when and how He must blow upon us, and when at times there is a lull and we experience nothing of His blowings, we should do like a seaman in a calm, quietly wait and not worry; but when this heavenly breeze comes then set sail to follow His promptings. Follow the lead of the Spirit of Christ, and He will lead you into eternal life. AMEN.

I. SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

TEXT: There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died, and was buried: and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried, and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you, cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee, therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.—Luke 16, 19-31.

This Gospel tells us of two men who fared very differently both in this world and the next. The one was rich, dwelling in a splendid residence, dressed fine and having all luxuries and enjoyments at his command; the other lay at the rich man's gate both sick and poor, scarcely possessing clothes to cover his nakedness, hardly receiving food enough to keep him from starving to death, and the dogs were the only doctors that waited on him.

Is that the way it should be in this world: some rich, some poor? some having abundance, others possessing nothing? The modern apostles of equality declare that so it should not be, and they pronounce this constitution of society the main source of

the many evils under which civilized nations are suffering. The advocates of socialism and communism pronounce the unequal division of property and money the one great misfortune of the world, and they say, if riches and poverty would once be abolished and possessions would be equalized, then the golden era would return and happiness and good will would again rule on the earth. With glowing words will socialist orators contrast the present gloomy condition of the oppressed masses with the ideal happiness which they promise man in the future communistic state. These notions are nothing but idle dreams of men of reprobate minds, who "professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." Rom. 1, 22. The adage: "Many men many minds" ought to convince every socialist that community of possession could bring no common happiness unless men be made of the same mind. So long as some have the mind to scatter and others the mind to gather they must both feel very unhappy in a communistic state where there could be neither gathering nor scattering.

God's order is that rich and poor should dwell together, as Solomon says: "The rich and poor meet together: the Lord is the maker of them all." Prov. 22, 2. This is God's order and being God's order it is good. There has been and yet is great contention between rich and poor, and it has often resulted in much bloodshed and the devastation of whole cities and countries, but God's order is not the cause of this strife. The cause is the wickedness of men that the rich are selfish, arrogant and oppress the poor, and the poor are discontented and envious of the rich. God's order is wise and wholesome and good, but "sin is a reproach to any people." Prov. 14, 34. The misfortune of the world is not that some are rich and some poor; the misfortune of the world is that men will not hear and do the Word of God. The remedy for the evils in the world is not the equal division of property, the only one true remedy is the Word of God. Of Israel the Book of Wisdom says: "It was neither herb, nor mollifying plaster that healed them, but thy word, O Lord, which healeth all things." If all would hear the Word of God the rich would not be proud and heartless toward

the poor, and the poor would not be discontented and envious of the rich, but each would move in his station, intent on causing joy to others. If the Bible would rule in every house and every heart then a golden age would dawn upon the world. "Blessed," says the Lord, and His words apply to all ages and all classes of society, "blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." Luke 11, 28. Happy the man who hears and keeps God's Word whether he be rich or poor, and unhappy the man who will not hear and keep God's Word whether he be rich or poor. This is illustrated in the two men in our text. Let us consider

THE LIFE AND REWARD OF LAZARUS AND THE RICH MAN AS AN
INSTRUCTIVE EXAMPLE FOR US.

Let us hear

- I. How they lived in this world;
- II. How they fared in the other world;
- III. How to avoid the place of torment and to attain salvation.

I.

What will be the condition of the soul after death? That is a question which human wisdom cannot answer. Man knows that the soul is immortal, that there is a hereafter, but the land beyond the river of death is to man an unexplored region of which he can know nothing positive by his own research. We know only what God has seen fit to reveal unto us and nothing more. Now here in our text Christ lifts the curtain between time and eternity, and affords us a glance both into the place of happiness and into the place of torment prepared for Satan and his angels. But though hell was prepared for the fallen angels only and not for men, yet by far the greater part of men will also be found there.

Of heaven the Lord does here not say much, and the text does not require us to enter on a lengthy description of it. It is called "*Abraham's bosom*," the place of happiness and pleasures for evermore, the place where those go who are of the faith of Abraham. From this name with which the Lord here desig-

nates the place of happiness we justly conclude that Lazarus lived a life of faith in the promise given to Abraham and his seed; for it is written: "They which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham." Gal. 3, 7. He was one of the unfortunates of the earth. Sick and dependent on the benevolence of others he was friendless, and it seems he experienced more kindness from the dogs than from men, but his trust was in the Redeemer of Israel, and he looked forward with hope to the day of his departure out of this world. He died forsaken of men; no tears were shed over him, and of his burial nothing is said. He was buried as the poor are buried in the Potter's Field. But the angels of heaven were in waiting and they carried his soul into the bosom of him whose true son he had been.

Of the place of torment the Lord here speaks at greater length. Indeed we have here a lurid pen-picture of it. What brings men to the place of torment? Our text tells us that the rich man went to hell, but it does not say that his riches brought him there. The Bible does teach that the possession of riches is connected with great dangers to the soul, as the Lord says in the 19th chapter of Matthew: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." Yet when His disciples asked: "Who then can be saved?" the Lord answered: "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." With men, whether rich or poor, it is impossible to be saved, because no man can save himself; but with God it is possible to save both the rich and the poor. King David was certainly rich and he is in heaven. Riches do not condemn, and poverty does not save. It was not his riches that brought this man to hell.

What did bring this rich man to the place of torment? The text tells us three things concerning his life on earth. In the first place, his manner of life is described in this wise: "*There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day.*" In this way the rich man spent his time. He daily dressed well and regaled himself with delicate eating and drinking. Is it fine dress and sumptuous fare that brings men to hell? If riches do not condemn,

neither will their use. The Scriptures tell us of men who dressed fine and fared sumptuously, and yet were the children of God. There is Joseph whom Pharaoh made viceroy of Egypt. He wore a royal dress, a gold chain, a diamond ring, and at his command were the most delicious viands and the most costly beverages; yet he was and remained a pious man and was saved. Fine dress and good living in itself will not condemn a man, just as little as wearing rags and living on roots will save a man.

Yet the Lord does not mention this man's manner of life without a special reason, but to indicate what the sentiment, principle, life and aim of this man were. The Lord means to tell us that this was the rich man's mind, his delight, his study, to dress well and to fare sumptuously, and he cared for nothing else. So this man was of a different sentiment than Solomon. Solomon was arrayed gloriously and he fared sumptuously, but of these things Solomon said: "All is vanity." But this man did not count these things vanity. They were his heaven. He lived in order to dress fine and to eat and drink well.

Selfishly living only for his own enjoyment it is no wonder that this rich man was unmerciful towards the poor. "*And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table.*" There are doors which are frequented by the poor, because they know that they do not knock there in vain; and there are doors to which beggars are not apt to go the second time, and that is a bad sign for such a house. But this poor man was in a condition that he was not able to move about; he was obliged to stay at that uncharitable gate. And the text does not say that the rich man never gave any thing to Lazarus; it rather seems that Lazarus did find a scanty living at this man's door, otherwise he *could* not have remained there. Why should not this rich and popular man from time to time have instituted a charity banquet, dividing the proceeds of the frolic among the poor, and winning for himself the fame of benevolence? But though he may have given alms to the poor, though he may have had charity suppers, yet he had no true charity towards the poor. His heart was wholly given to selfish-

ness and pride. He took no stock in the world to come, he lived for this world only and so he continued to live until he died.

Finally our text tells us of this man that in his lifetime he did not hear Moses and the prophets. When Abraham told him his brothers should hear Moses and the prophets, he answered: "*Nay, father Abraham; but if one went unto them from the dead they will repent.*" He knew, his brothers would not hear Moses and the prophets, as little as he had heard them. Though he had heard the Word of God with his ears, yet he did not lay it to heart; for if he had taken it to heart he would have lived differently than he did. That condemned him; for Solomon says: "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." Prov. 28, 9.

We must not think that this rich man had been a debauchee sold under gluttony and drunkenness; he was no doubt an honorable, perhaps a highly honored man. He was rich and his affections were with his riches, but he was not a miser. He did not love money simply for money's sake, he loved money for the enjoyments which it affords, and he knew how to spend money. He dressed fine after the newest fashion and he kept a grand house which was often filled with merry guests. There were banquets and receptions and merry-makings, and these things he enjoyed greatly, and his brothers and friends likewise. He was neither a miser nor a sot, but he delighted in a splendid house, stylish furniture, costly dress; he loved good eating and drinking and merry company. These things were his life, on them he thought, and as for Moses and the prophets he did not need them and had no use for them. He was a man of the world, a fast society man, and his house one of the finest and most popular in the community.

That he was not a recluse, but one of a great company we can infer from his words when he says to Abraham: "*I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldst send him to my father's house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come to this place of torment.*" His brothers had been his companions in his manner of life. Five brothers! Are they living yet? Those five have joined their brother in the

place of torment long ago, but the rich man has some brothers and sisters still living, men and women who are of a kindred mind with him, who love what he loved and live as he lived. How many are there? It would be a great undertaking to number the rich man's brothers and sisters. Some of them live in cities, some in villages, some in the country. I would not be surprised if some of the rich man's brothers and sisters were here present; for some of his kinsfolk are in the habit of going to church, especially if there is a church which is counted popular and stylish. Who are the rich man's brothers and sisters? They are all those who say in their heart: 'To have an elegant home, fine dress, plenty money, something good to eat and drink, many friends and much enjoyment and pleasure, that's the thing.' All those whose chief desire is in the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life are the rich man's kindred. St. John confirms this, saying: "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." 1 Ep. 2, 15. They that love the world and the things that are in the world are the rich man's brothers and sisters, and the world is everywhere full of them; for the way in which this rich man walked is the broad way of the flesh and the world.

II.

This broad way leads down to destruction. What is that destruction? What does our text tell us of the condition of the ungodly and unbelieving in eternity? Of the rich man the Lord says: "*And in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.*" Hell is the prison into which the fallen angels are cast and to which all those must go who do not die in the Lord. It is the outer darkness, the place of banishment from the countenance of the Lord, in which the damned suffer unspeakable torture both in body and soul. It is here called the place of torment. The rich man complains: "*I am tormented in this flame.*" Matthew

13, 41 we read: "The Son of man shall send forth his angels and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." In this place of the damned there is continual wailing and gnashing of teeth; for it is a furnace of fire. In glowing colors are the torments of the damned described in the 14th chapter of Revelations, where it is said: "The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever; and they have no rest day nor night." In the presence of the Lamb whom they despised they will suffer misery and will find no respite day nor night.

The rich man was fully conscious and he realized the awful condition in which he was. What a great relief to a patient, if slumber falls on his eyelids, if consciousness departs and he does not realize his pains. But this rich man was wide awake and he could not sleep. Neither was the past buried to him in oblivion. He knew what he had been on earth, and his soul was pierced with remorse by the remembrance of what he had done and what he had neglected. It was ever before his eyes and he could not forget it. Murderers are often pursued by the remembrance of their crime wherever they go. They cannot rid their mind of it in the day and they dream of it in the night. When death draws near the sins of the ungodly rise up to terrify them and after death the remembrance of their evil deeds becomes a fire in their soul which burns and will not be quenched. Vividly must the wickedness of his life have been brought home to the rich man when he saw Lazarus in Abraham's bosom. On earth he had despised him as a loathsome beggar, but now the scales had turned. Now Lazarus was in glory and he in misery, begging for a drop of water. Must not the rich man have said: 'Did not I count this Lazarus less than my dog, and now he is numbered with the saints in light. Woe is me that I could walk in such blindness and foolish pride.' The

very sight of Lazarus and the seat of the blessed must have increased the remorse of the rich man and must have caused him to feel more keenly that misery into which he had brought himself by his own folly. He knew the salvation which Lazarus was now enjoying was brought nigh unto him, and he had despised it. Of the Lord coming to judgment John writes in the first chapter of Revelations: "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." When the ungodly and the unbelieving will see Jesus coming in the clouds of heaven they will be obliged to confess: 'This is He who died to redeem us from our sins and who knocked at the door of our hearts pleading for our souls, and we would not hear.' And vainly they will strive to flee from His countenance and to hide in the dens and caves of the earth. But whither should they flee? Though they take wings to fly away, yet hell will follow them, and the consciousness of their guilt will pursue them and burn within them like brimstone.

From our text we also learn that in hell there will be degrees of suffering. The damnation of those in hell is alike; they are all equally excluded from heaven; they are all in misery; yet some will receive more stripes than others; they will suffer greater torment according to the measure of their wickedness on earth. This rich man asked that Lazarus should be sent to his brothers to "*testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.*" Why did he not want his brothers to come to that same place in which he was? Did he become pious in hell that from love to his brothers he desired they should not come to the place of torment? In hell there is no love, no charity or pity; there selfishness, envy and hatred rule supreme. But this man had set an evil example to his brothers. He had led them on to a life of sin, or had strengthened them in impenitence, unbelief and carnal-mindedness by his own carnal life, and he knew, if his brothers came to the same place they would upbraid him, and so his torments would be increased.

That there are degrees of torment in hell is clearly established in other passages of the Scriptures. When the Lord once

sent forth His disciples to preach the Gospel He commanded them, if a city would not receive their word they should shake the very dust of that city from off their feet for a testimony against it, and He added: "Verily, I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment, than for that city." Matt. 10, 15. They that hear the Word of God, and despise it; they that live in a land where the Gospel is preached, and will not hear it, will suffer greater torment than the heathen who have not the Gospel of Christ. You have perhaps heard wicked men fearlessly say, if they would get to hell they would find companions there. Yes, they will find companions there, companions who will make them more miserable. Surely, a retribution awaits the wicked. To the seducers a terrible reward will come. "It must needs be," says the Lord, "that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!" Matt. 18, 7. This rich man had given offence to his brothers setting them the example of a carnal, worldly life, and when he was in hell he dreaded their coming; for he feared they would say unto him: 'Is this the place thou hast led us to? is this the outcome of thy wisdom?' People who have drawn others away from Christ, church and religion unto sin and worldly-mindedness, all who by word or deed corrupted innocent hearts, will be racked with remorse when in hell they will meet those whom they seduced on earth. Then will children upbraid their parents, saying: 'You brought us up in the ways of the world, and did not lead us unto the knowledge of the Lord; yours is the fault that we are in this furnace of fire.' The unbelieving will all meet in hell, they will all suffer torments, but the greater wickedness they perpetrated on earth the greater torments will they suffer.

Finally we learn from this text, that the torments of the damned will know no end, no respite, no relief; uninterruptedly they continue forever. The rich man requested a drop of water to relieve his torment, but Abraham answered: "*Son, remember, that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things: but now thou art tormented.*" He had his good things on earth and had no more any good things to expect. They that live for this world

only receive good in this world only; in eternity they have no more any good to expect. Not one moment of relief or rest, but endless torment without hope; for to this rich man Abraham said: "*Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you, cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.*" Between heaven and hell there is a gulf fixed, fixed for good, and that gulf is impassable. Hope of deliverance to come is not known in hell; they that are there must remain there. "When a wicked man dieth," says Solomon, "his expectation shall perish." Prov. 11, 7. Of the damned Isaiah declares: "Their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched." Is. 66, 24.

Hell is the land of death without life, the region of darkness without light, the pit of sorrow without joy. It is the fiery pool where the condemned wail forever unheard, the deep from which they woefully cry and find no glimpse of hope, where they are deserted and have no comforter. The prophet Jeremiah was cast into the dungeon of Malchiah where he sank into the mire, but soon he was drawn out again. But from the pool of fire and brimstone there is no deliverance. There the molten waves lift up their victims only to hurl them despairing and cursing back into the deep. When the wrath of God against the wicked will come to an end, then will the torments of the damned cease; but the wrath of God is eternal, therefore the torments of the damned will know no end. When the righteousness of God will be changed then will the condition of hell's inhabitants be changed; but the righteousness of God is unchangeable, therefore the fetters of darkness will forever remain upon them. If a traveler in the desert is starving from thirst and heat would it not be dreadful for him always to remain in this condition without being able to die? Such is the condition of the rich man. When after enduring the torment a thousand years he asks with quivering lips: 'Watchman is the night soon o'er?' 'Eternally' replies unchangeable Justice.

Sad place, alas! What heart can bear
Hopeless in all those pangs to lie,
Racked with vexation, grief, despair
And ever dying never die.

III.

Why does the Lord give us so full and vivid a description of the place of torment to which this rich man went and to which all who imitate him must follow? Did He do it, because He delighted in picturing scenes of horror? or because He found pleasure in terrifying men and filling their hearts with forebodings of evil? Nay, but it is a strong testimony of His love and His desire for our salvation. If the Lord desired our destruction He would surely not have revealed these things unto us. He would have left us in ignorance, blindly to travel on to that place of torment; but the Lord tells us these things while we are yet in the time of grace that we should be induced to turn from the way of the flesh. The Lord gives us so vivid a description of the place where the broad way ends, because it is His heart's desire that we should stay our foot and turn from that way. He pictures to us where a life for this world only will bring us in order to persuade us to turn to repentance and to seek the Lord while He may be found.

Awake, O man, from sinful sleep;
Henceforth thy feet from wand'ring keep;
Seek God by true repentance.
Awake, behold thy wasting sand!
Eternity is just at hand,
And brings thine awful sentence.
This is perchance thy final day;
This hour thy soul may haste away.

Be not an Agnostic to say: 'We know nothing positive of the hereafter; for none ever returned from the dead to bring us a report. Therefore we count it the part of wisdom to enjoy this present world whose treasures and pleasures we can see, feel and tax, and let the next world take care of itself.' Such has always been the sentiment of the rich man and his followers. Would they believe, if one returned from the dead? "*If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.*" One returning from the dead to preach to the living must either preach a falsehood or the truth. If he would preach a lie, if he would say, the wicked

would be utterly annihilated, or all would finally get to heaven, or there would be a second probation, another chance of salvation after death, yes, *that* would be a gospel for the world; that would suit all those who are of a kindred mind with the rich man and they would eagerly receive it. But if one returning from the dead would preach the truth, he would preach the same things which the Bible says and those are just the very things which the worldly-minded do not want to receive, and they would soon find some pretext for rejecting his testimony. The real fact is, those of the same mind with the rich man do not want to believe, and when they ask for other testimony besides the written Word, they are only seeking a cloak for their wayward unbelief.

Do you want the testimony of One who was dead? Take the testimony of Jesus of Nazareth. He was dead and He rose again. He knows all about the world to come, and He has testified unto us these things. Our Lord Jesus Christ came down from heaven and took upon Himself the form of a servant to tell us of the horrors of that place towards which we were traveling even by nature, and should we despise His mercy? Should we be mockers who make a jest of hell? Should we be skeptics who pretend to doubt the existence of hell, when our own conscience convinces us that there is a day coming when every man shall receive according to the deeds done in the body? Should we, like arrant fools, strive to avoid thinking of the judgment, because it is an unpleasant thought? Ah, no! but we should contemplate the mercy of the Lord, and should be persuaded by His love, not to walk in the way in which this man walked. We must do what the rich man did not do, we must hear Moses and the prophets, and we must not only hear them with the ears, but we must do what they teach us.

We have no reason to assume that this rich man was a scoffer, or that his purple robe was never conspicuous in the synagogue. Perhaps an elegant carriage was in waiting every Sabbath morning to take him to the house of worship. Most likely he did hear Moses and the prophets read, and as a patriotic Jew he also praised them, declaring: 'The prophets were all good men

and there is no nation that ever had such a great lawgiver as our Moses,' and then he went home to live after the flesh. There is a kind of hearing which will allow people to live on in sin. How do you hear? Do you so hear as to say: 'The Gospel is an entertaining subject and we had an elegant sermon to-day,' and then you go to live after the lust of your own heart? Friend, be warned! That kind of hearing can only bring you down lower into the place of torment. So hear that you profit by it.

From the law given by Moses let us learn what we are: children of wrath even by nature, poor, lost and condemned creatures, because we have offended against the Lord our God, and from childhood up have violated His law; and let us flee for refuge to that Lord who came into the world to deliver us from the wrath to come. We must not think that this rich man must have been a sinner above sinners, because he came to the place of torment. What he deserved the same we, according to the law and justice, also deserve; for the apostle declares: "There is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Rom. 3, 22. If we have not lived in the same manner as this rich man, yet we are sinners. Death, that death where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched, is the just wages of our sins. There is only one thing which can save us from coming to the place of torment: The grace of God through the redemption in Christ Jesus. To that grace let us appeal, making the redemption of Christ our only plea, and in this faith let us not waver until our souls are carried into the bosom of the father of the faithful; "for by grace are ye saved, through faith." As the man in our text lived to dress fine and fare sumptuously, so let us make this our chief aim and study to become intimately acquainted with Jesus to whom both Moses and the prophets direct us, that we may become more and more rooted in the hope of salvation by Him and be able freely to say with St. Paul: "God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him." 1 Thess. 5, 9. AMEN.

II. SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

TEXT; Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: and sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife: and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and showed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry, said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden, shall taste of my supper. Luke 14, 16-24.

“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief,” so writes the apostle Paul in his first letter to Timothy, 1, 15. What a wonderful thing that God; for Jesus Christ “is over all, God blessed forever;” that God came down from heaven into this nether world, from the seat of Majesty into this vale of tears, from the everlasting temple of holiness into this world of sin. What was the object of this greatest of all the marvelous deeds of God? Great must have been the object which prevailed on the Lord of glory to come into this world of shame. Paul tells us His object: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” He did not come to make the poor rich in worldly possessions; for He Himself became so poor upon earth that He had not where to lay His head. He did not come to exalt the lowly and despised to worldly honors; for He Himself was meek and lowly and humbled Himself to the death of the cross. He did not come to bring the unfortunate earthly prosperity and happiness; for He Himself was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

He did not come to make His followers worldly potentates and rulers over the earth; for He said unto His disciples: "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant." Matt. 23, 11. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." The sole purpose of His coming into the world is to save sinners, to save those who had fallen into sin, wrath and damnation, and to make them rich before God, rich in grace, in righteousness, in life and salvation.

But since God Himself came into the world for this purpose it incontrovertibly follows that whosoever seeks salvation in Christ shall find it, even though he be the chief of sinners; for, says Paul, "Christ Jesus came to save sinners; of whom I am chief." Christ is come to save all that are called sinners. Now we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God; so Christ is come to save us all, and not us only, but all sinners on the whole face of the earth, as St. John writes: "He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." 1 John 2, 2. And not only has He prepared salvation for the whole world, He also invites and entreats all to partake of His salvation. Therefore He sends preachers to all lands to proclaim His salvation to all nations and to urge the vagrants worshipping wood and stone to come to His supper, as Paul witnessed to the elders of Ephesus that he had testified, "both to the Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." Acts 20, 21. And to the Colossians the same apostle writes of "the Gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven." Ch. 1, 23.

This is depicted in the parable before us. This "*great supper*" is the great salvation which the Housefather of the universe has prepared for all sinners in His Son Jesus Christ. The first guests invited to this supper were Adam and Eve, and the invitation was extended to all generations of the first world. The same invitation was transmitted to the second world by Noah; it was proclaimed by the patriarchs in their travels; it was recorded by Moses; it was pictured in the sacrifices of the Levitical worship; it was preached by the long line of prophets

in Israel. Many rejoiced over this invitation and they sighed: "Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! when the Lord bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad." Ps. 14, 7.

When the time for the spreading of the table had arrived John the Baptist cried in the wilderness: "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," and Jesus Himself "came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel." Mark 1, 14. But seeing what kind of a supper it was to be the great and mighty among the Jews began to make excuse and the Lord said unto them: "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." Matt. 21, 43. Yet many of the meek and lowly in Israel did come. Joseph and Mary in the stable, Peter mending his net, Matthew sitting at the receipt of custom, the malefactor on the cross, these and many more accepted the invitation. But by those coming from "*the streets and lanes of the city*" the house of the Father was not filled; for that house has many mansions. Therefore the Lord sent His servants "*out into the highways and hedges,*" to the nations sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, worshiping idols of silver and gold made by their own hands, and of these countless myriads have been brought in. But the house of the Father is not full yet. The invitation: "*Come, for all things are now ready,*" is still going on. To you this invitation has come before, and I repeat it to-day. And as we live in a commercial age when men and women are quick to calculate gain and loss, let me cast up the question:

WHAT DOES IT COST TO BE A CHRISTIAN?

- I. It costs nothing;
- II. It costs everything.

I.

The Lord spake this parable in the house of a Pharisee by whom He had been invited to dinner on the Sabbath. There a company of Pharisees were watching Him, but He was not

abashed and, seeing their arrogance in seeking to obtain the most honorable places at the table, He said to the host, when giving a dinner he should not invite his wealthy kinsmen and rich neighbors who would return the favor, but the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind and it would be recompensed unto him at the resurrection of the just. Hearing this one of the company said: "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." Perhaps this man meant to rebuke the Lord and to intimate that on the Sabbath the conversation should not turn on such trivial matters as the invitation of guests, but on higher things; perhaps he spake from a sincere heart, desiring to learn from the Lord what he must do to enter into the kingdom of God. Be that as it may, the Lord answered him with this parable, and in it showed to him what is required of a man, if he would eat bread in the kingdom of God, that is, if he would be saved.

What did the Lord tell this man? What will it cost a man, or what must a man give to God, or what works must a man do in order to be received into the kingdom of God? Our first answer to this question is, that it costs a man nothing, and this is the Lord's own answer; for He says: "*A certain man made a great supper, and bade many; and sent his servant at supper time, to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready.*" Again: "*Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.*" And again: "*Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.*" Nothing is required of these guests, they are simply told to come to the supper. "Ho," says Isaiah 55, 1, "every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." The kingdom of God is not for sale; no money is needed; the pearl of great price is bought without money. "Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Rev. 22, 17. "By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." Eph. 2, 8. The access to the kingdom of God is

free, there is no entrance fee, salvation is a gift. Nor yet a gift in the common meaning of the word; not a gift as friend bestows upon friend where the gift is called forth by some merit, or excellence, or worthiness of the person on whom it is bestowed; but a gracious gift, a gift which is bestowed on those who have not deserved it and are not worthy of it.

But why appeal to other Scripture passages to show that partaking of the salvation of Christ is free and costs nothing? Here in our parable it is pictured to our eyes as in a drawing; for here we behold a great supper prepared, the great doors of the dining hall thrown wide open and a multitude of forlorn, unwashed, unkempt, ragged people crowding in. Here there is no bar of social standing, no degree of morality required, no color line. The supper is free, the entrance free and servants are continually hastening out and crying in the public places, in streets, lanes, alleys, forests, yea, crying over the stagnant swamps and slums: Come, come ye to the supper. My friend, will you come? It costs you nothing.

Do you doubt, if indeed it be altogether free? Let me prove to you that I am saying true. "*Come*," says the Lord, "*for all things are now ready*." You need do nothing to prepare this supper; it is ready; the hot work at the cooking stove has been done; the Lamb without spot and without blemish has been slain and roasted over the fire of Divine wrath. The wine-fat has been trod, and the wine of the blood of Christ is poured out; the table is set; you need not even move up a chair for yourself, it is set already; for He that prepared this supper said: "I go to prepare a place for you." Indeed, if I were to ask you to prepare this supper, or help prepare it, or do the very least for its preparation, then would I shut my mouth and be silent as the grave; for that would be inviting you to a task like dipping out the ocean. But I am not sent to bear any such message, the Master of the house has sent me to cry out: "*Come, for all things are now ready*."

You will perhaps say: 'All this is very plain; the supper is ready and it is free; salvation is prepared by Christ and it is given freely, but how must I prepare myself, how must I dress

worthily to appear at this supper? what is the style there? what will the dining robe cost me?' Do you want to make one for yourself, or buy a garment which will render you worthy to appear at this supper? I tell you, the guests at this supper are dressed fine. If you want to make yourself a becoming garment you had better go to work; for I can assure you that it will take you many a year. If you want to buy the dress you had better gather up your dollars, sell your plantations and whatever you possess, and if you have gathered up all your possessions I must still tell you that it is not sufficient to purchase one thread of the robe worn at this supper. But you need not spend one cent to purchase a becoming garment, nor do one thing to make yourself worthy. Once, indeed, there was the inscription over the door of the entrance to the kingdom reading: No admission for sinners. "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." Gal. 3, 10. That would exclude me and you and all that are not perfectly holy, but now that inscription is removed and there is an altogether different arrangement. Under the order of Moses the hall would have remained empty, but now there is a multitude of guests, and they are all dressed in the finest robe.

How does this agree with the text? What kind of people were those that came to this supper? When the genteel ones invited declined to come the Master of the house commanded His servants: "*Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt and the blind.*" These were people from the streets and alleys of Jerusalem, poor fishermen from the sea of Galilee, publicans and sinners, low and unclean people in the sight of those moralists, the Pharisees. Again the Master of the house commanded: "*Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.*" These highwaymen and hedge-hiders were the Gentiles, idolatrous, barbarous and savage nations. Such were the people that came to the supper.

Well then how could they be dressed so fine? O that is very simple. With some ancients it was customary that the guests at

weddings and other grand banquets did not appear in their own dress. Though a guest dressed ever so costly it would have been a grave offence against the master of the house, would he have stepped into the banquet hall in his own dress, because the giver of the banquet himself prepared a festive robe for each one of his guests. Arriving at the house the guests stepped into an ante-chamber, were dressed in the robe there ready for them, and so appeared at the banquet, not dressed in their own garments, but in the robe prepared by the master of the house. So it is at this supper. The guests come ragged and soiled as the servants find them in the streets and on the highways, but at the entrance there is a kind, mild, good Lord, Jesus of Nazareth, He clothes them with a robe of white silk which is the righteousness of the saints, and so they sit at the supper table dressed fine enough for the company of angels. As the supper is free, so also the robe of Christ is furnished freely, as St. Paul writes: "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Rom. 4, 5. The righteous need no justification; Jesus Christ is the justifier of the ungodly. Come to His supper. Do not stop long to put on a decent coat; all your efforts will help you nothing. The longer you tarry the more soiled you become, because you daily commit much sin. No matter how tattered your dress, how soiled your hands, how bespotted your heart; come, and apply to the door-keeper, Jesus Christ, and tell Him:

Just as I am, without one plea,
Save that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

Let not the condition of your dress restrain you, but rather urge you on to apply to Him. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Is. 1, 18. If you let Jesus Christ see to your dress it will be as the bride is described in the 45th Psalm: "The king's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework."

Neither need you fear there might be no more room for you in the banquet hall. "*Yet there is room.*" It is fulfilled what the Lord promised Abraham. His seed, I mean his spiritual seed, is become numberless as the stars of the heavens, but the heavens are spanned over the length and breadth of the earth, and for every one under heaven there is a place and a chair in this banquet hall. For you too there is a chair, and the Lord does not want that chair to remain empty, He wants you to come and to occupy it that His house may be filled.

II.

Carried away by the beauty of this parable, I have tarried long in the first part of our discourse. Neither do I regret this; for gratuitous justification, free salvation is our only hope. If the calling of God were conditional to the effect that we should come, provided we would in some way make due preparation, then there would be no hope for us, because man is by nature dead in trespasses and sins, and how can a dead man begin to make the least preparation? But here there are no conditions. The word is: "*Come,*" simply and only: "*Come.*" A free invitation to a free salvation.

Why then did those men first invited refuse to come? They talk like calculating business men having an eye to their advantage, and it certainly must cost something, or they would not have declined. I answer: According to *their* sentiment it would have cost those men everything, their all, to accept this invitation. Hear them and judge by their own words: "*The first said, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife: and therefore I cannot come.*" The key to the understanding of the sentiment of these men is furnished us in the Lord's words: "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Matt. 6, 21. Those who do come to this supper it costs nothing at all; for they are people who have come to a knowledge of their sins and who hunger and thirst after right-

eousness. When these find the pearl of great price, righteousness before God through faith in Jesus Christ, it is so precious a thing to them that they, so to say, forget all else, and are ready if need be to sell all that they have only to possess this pearl. But the heart's love of the three men in the text was in their lands, oxen and family, and it appeared to them like giving up everything worth possessing to come to this supper. Nor was the first asked to give away his lands, or the second to forsake his oxen, or the third to be divorced from his wife; they were only asked to turn their attention to this supper and to account it more precious than the things they possessed, and this they declined to do. So long as the heart finds its treasure, its heaven in something of this earth, it is filled already and will give no heed to the invitation of the Gospel. The world and that which is in the world is all the love of an earthly-minded heart; it lives for that which is in the world, and such a heart it would indeed cost its all to give heed to the Lord's invitation, because first the love of the world must be put away out of the heart before it can taste of this supper. If any of you are thus minded, I beg you to consider that the time is coming when you will be called away from this earth, when you must depart from your treasure, and what then? Verily, then the word will apply to you: "*I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.*" If in the time of your invitation you decline, because your soul is filled with the husks of this world, you will hunger forever. Time slips by. To-day God calls you, to-day hear His voice.

Say not: 'Now in the harvest; it is too busy a time to devote much attention to religion.' In the fall you will be busy seeding, and the coming winter you must attend to your stock and will want to visit your friends. Should not this very busy man, the farmer, be excusable for not giving much thought to religion? But why do you think that a man cannot be a good farmer and a good Christian at the same time? Is it not a fact that godliness makes a man more industrious and faithful in his earthly duties? If men are so wrapped up in their worldly affairs as to pay no attention to the Gospel invitation,

this is not an excuse for them, but it is a proof that their heart's treasure is in earthly things, and that they regard the earthly of vastly more importance than the heavenly. When they are asked to loose their hearts from earthly things they count the price too high, and God understands the language of their heart that they love money more than they love God.

You perhaps complain: 'If I only could loose my affections from this earth, but the heart is a perverse thing; ever again it will forget heaven and draw me to the earth.' Yes, so the heart is; it is of the earth earthy, and no man can change his own heart. It will cleave unto earthly things until it is new-created by the Holy Ghost, and even then there remains a contest between the spirit and the flesh so long as man lives.

Must men not be excused for not coming to this supper, since man has no ability to come? Nay, the plea of inability will by no means screen us. The Lord does not excuse the three men in our text, He is angry at their declining. By our own reason and strength we can indeed nevermore come to Jesus Christ, but where does the Lord say that we are to come by our own ability? He says: "*Come*," but not with one syllable does He say that we must come by our own strength. When the Lord called into the sepulchre of Lazarus: "Lazarus, come forth," the meaning was not that Lazarus was able to come forth, or must do it by his own strength; for what powers could a dead man have? Nevertheless Lazarus did come forth by the power of Christ's word. In you there is no ability to come, but the Lord wants you to come and He bids you come, not because you are able, but because He calls you, as Lazarus came forth, not because he was able, but because the Lord called him. By His Word the Lord draws you, and if you decline, that is something more than inability; it is refusing, it is stubbornness.

O consider! though to you this supper is free, it cost the Lord a high price. When He came to those who had long been invited they received Him not, but thrust Him out of their city and raised Him on the cross. Yet He did not take His salvation away from the earth, He rather said: 'If these will not come, go and bring in others.' So the invitation went forth to

the Gentiles and is come to you. Life and immortality is brought to light through Jesus Christ and unto you is His calling when He says: "Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." Is. 55, 3. Will you not accept His invitation? Will you oblige Him to relinquish you and to go on to the next man? The Father wants His house filled and He asks you to occupy a place in it. Refuse Him not; for if you do He will find another who will come. Pride not yourself in being virtuous and refined. I tell you, Jesus Christ can go and take a savage and make him a better and nobler man than you ever were. Whether you are noble or ignoble, to-day the Lord calls upon you and says: Come to my supper; for all things are ready, and yet there is room.

And now, my friends, what shall I report to Him that sent me? "*So that servant came, and showed his lord these things.*" The Housefather wants a report from His servants, and what report shall I give, when on that great day He will say: 'I sent thee to a people in the Valley of Virginia to invite them to my supper, and was it done?' This much I can say: 'Lord, it was done, in much weakness, but as best I could.' But what shall I report if He says: Where are those people? Did they come, or did they beg to be excused?'

God grant that we may stand before the throne of the Lamb a goodly company. AMEN.

III. SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

TEXT: Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. Either what woman, having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it she calleth her friends and her neighbors together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.—Luke 15. 1-10.

In the 51st Psalm David prays: "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." David uttered this petition with reference to his having fallen away from God into adultery and murder, but in this prayer David does not only mean that God should cleanse his conscience from those grievous sins which he had committed, he prays for a clean heart in general; a heart not only clean from sin, sinful desires and unclean lustings, but also clean from errors; a heart which would entertain no false notions concerning the being and the will of God; for he adds: "And renew a right spirit within me." David desired a heart controlled by that Spirit who teaches the true and saving knowledge of God and His will, and who, through this knowledge, creates in the heart a trust and hope which, based on an immovable foundation, cannot fail or deceive.

How indispensably necessary it is for the true comfort of the soul that the heart has the true knowledge of God and His will and is clean from erroneous opinions and a false trust, this we clearly see from the Lord's words in His prayer for His disciples saying: "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." John 17, 3. For the possession of eternal life the true knowledge of God and the Savior whom He has sent is indispensably necessary. Without it no man can have eternal life abiding in him. Without the true knowledge of God and His Savior the Word of the cross will always remain either a stumbling-block or foolishness to men. Why are the servants of sin so secure in their impenitence and wickedness? Because they know not the wrath of God against sin; for if they did know it they would dread to excite the vengeance of the Almighty against themselves. Why do the self-righteous depend on their own piety and good works for righteousness? Because they know not the righteousness of God; for if they did know it, they would see and know that their works in the law, being nothing but miserable patchwork, must be rejected before Him. Why do so many despair of being saved? Because they know not the grace of God and the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ; for if they knew it, they would trust the love of God, and would find rest in the compassion of Christ. The man who has not the true knowledge of God and His plan of salvation can not have saving faith nor the true fear and love of God, and hence can not possess eternal life.

This is a truth which Dr. Luther experienced abundantly in his younger years and he often writes about it. So he for instance says: "We must not regard Christ a judge as the pope pictured Christ to us. They think that Christ sits on high only to judge and to condemn. These were my thoughts in popery, and they were also your thoughts, as you will not deny. This was the object of our good works in all cloisters and orders to reconcile this judge. So the Gospel was entirely hid and lost to us, and we came to be heartily at enmity with Christ, and every body fled from Him." Because he had been raised in

blindness and error, therefore Jesus Christ was to young Luther a judge who condemns and not a savior who saves, and the consequence was that the very thought of Christ was terrifying to him, and only after he had come to the knowledge of the truth did he find rest for his soul in the faith of Christ.

This is the most important and necessary part of all our knowledge of God, the knowledge that God is a God of love, and that He sent His Son Jesus Christ to save His people from their sins, as Paul expresses it: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Only that man who has the right knowledge of Jesus Christ and His work upon earth, can come boldly to the mercy-seat with the assurance of the forgiveness of all his sins. Permit me to-day to speak to you of:

JESUS THE FRIEND AND SAVIOR OF SINNERS.

He is I. According to the testimony of the scribes and Pharisees the Friend of publicans and sinners.

He is II. According to His own words the good Shepherd who seeks and saves that which is lost.

He III. holds forth to us a special inducement for repentance.

I.

This Gospel commends Jesus to us as the Friend and Savior of sinners, and therein is comprised the whole object of His mission; for He was sent into the world by the Father for no other purpose than to save sinners, as He declared to Nicodemus: "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." If the Son of God had intended to judge the world and to condemn sinners it would not at all have been necessary for Him to become man; for being the true God He was the Lord and Judge of all the world. The very fact that "the Word was made flesh" proves conclusively that He came for a far different object than to judge the world. The object of God in sending His Son was not that He should judge, condemn, terrify and cast away sinners. He was

sent to be the Friend and Savior of sinners who would draw them unto Himself in grace, and mercy and would win their souls for heaven. He was sent to come in love for salvation, not in wrath for vengeance, and so He did come. He so walked on this earth, He so conducted Himself, He so taught and preached that sorrowing, disconsolate sinners were led to trust in Him and were made bold to draw nigh unto Him, as it is here said: "*Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.*" In very simple words—as narrating something self-evident and not to be expected otherwise—the Evangelist tells us what kind of people the majority of those were who assembled around the Lord, listened to His words with eagerness and rejoiced to be with Him, namely such people who had not lived as they ought to have lived, people with conscience spotted and hands soiled, people whom the Pharisees despised as having been public transgressors of the law.

What kind of people the words "*publicans and sinners*" denote we can easily gather from the fact that those moralists, the Pharisees, who were proud of their unblamableness in the law, despised them and regarded it a contamination, or damaging to one's reputation to associate with them. The publicans were tax collectors and, as a rule, they were avaricious, dishonest and hard men, who by exacting more than was right, and by other fraudulent means enriched themselves. Of Zaccheus, a chief among the publicans, it is said that "he was rich;" and that he had gathered his riches by foul means appears from the fact that when the Lord went to his house the multitude murmured, because "he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner." Luke 19, 7. "*Sinners*" the Pharisees counted all who were guilty of such an act, or had lived in such a vice which disgraced them before men. Such as that woman who in the house of Simon, the Pharisee, washed the Lord's feet with her tears and wiped them with the hairs of her head; for in regard to her touching the Lord Simon said within himself: "This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner." Luke 7, 39. There were moral men who also came to Jesus,

such as Nicodemus, the centurion of Capernaum and others, but besides these many came of whom it was a publicly known fact that they had been manifest transgressors of the law.

What was it that drew those publicans and sinners unto the Lord? Commonly the servants of sin do not feel at home in the society of pious and faithful Christians, and they avoid the company of the pious as much as possible, because their own conscience convinces them that they do not belong there. But here we behold manifest sinners eagerly seeking and associating with Jesus who most certainly walked piously and holily. How comes it that they loved to be with the Lord? what attracted them unto Him? why did they not rather go to seek their like? Doubtless, many of them had heard John the Baptist preach: "The axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." Matt. 3, 10. They had been evil trees bringing forth evil fruit. Their conscience was troubled by sins, they dreaded the wrath to come and they were comfortless.

But why did they come to Jesus of Nazareth in their need? Why did they not go elsewhere? Why did they not go to the scribes and Pharisees? O they knew these would give them no comfort, they would only condemn them; but they also knew that Jesus had a heart for penitent sinners. They came to Him, because in Him they found a Friend who helped them out of their troubles. If the Lord had treated them harshly according to law and justice, if He had angrily scolded them on account of their sins, they would soon have stayed away from Him. They did not go to the scribes and Pharisees, because from these they would only have heard that hard and sterile doctrine that they must keep the law in order to find favor with God, and just this was their trouble that they had not kept the law and could not be justified in it. But Jesus was not a hard master, teaching such a comfortless doctrine, He was that Comforter whom the Father had sent to comfort the waste places of Zion, to whom the Lord God had given "the tongue of the learned, that he should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary."

Is. 50, 4. If Jesus had come preaching salvation to the just, then sinners would have stayed away from Him and He would have been a vain comforter, because "there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not." Eccles. 7, 20, but He came preaching salvation to sinners, promising grace and pardon to the broken and contrite hearts; therefore penitent sinners from far and near flocked to Him to seek from Him comfort against sin. O how kindly must He have received those that labored and were heavy laden, how sweetly must He have comforted the sorrowing, how gently must He have healed the wounded hearts, since sinners thronged to Him in such numbers that the Evangelist can write: "*Then drew near unto him ALL the publicans and sinners for to hear him.*" Sinners of every description came to Him. Is not this an unquestionable proof that He must have been kind to sinners? Penitent sinners, no matter what they had done, or how they had formerly lived, found a kind reception with Him and He associated with them as His dear friends, brothers and sisters. Look at Zaccheus! He was certainly a miserable fellow. The poor cried out against him, widows sighed over him; for as a chief of the publicans he had gathered a fortune by fraud and oppression. But finally his sins came home to him, he was sorry for what he had done and repented of it. How did the Lord treat him? Why not one single hard word did He speak against this great, but now broken-hearted sinner. He rather said: "This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Luke 19, 9. Need we wonder that penitent sinners hastened unto the Lord, since with Him they found so kind a reception?

This fact that the Lord performed the office for which He was sent, that He proved Himself the friend and comforter of all penitent sinners, was an offensive thing to the scribes and Pharisees and they "*murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.*" These men were so holy in their own conceit that they regarded it a pollution in any way to have communion with those who had been guilty of a gross

transgression of the law. They counted it a disgrace to eat with sinners at the same table, and they scornfully said of Jesus: "*This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.*" They thought it a shame for the Lord to make Himself so common with manifest sinners, and they likely meant to insinuate that He was no better than these sinners, according to the saying: "Like priest, like people." Of these sentiments of the Pharisees the Lord was well aware; for in the 11th chapter of Matthew He quotes their blasphemies, saying: "John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners." This was the renown which the Lord gained with the scribes and Pharisees by His loving kindness towards penitent sinners that they called Him "*the friend of publicans and sinners,*" and intimated that He must be nigh of kin to these sinners, because like and like would associate.

But unto us and to all those who have applied the eyesalve of the law and have experienced its strength, who know that they are "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked," this blasphemy of the scribes and Pharisees is a strong consolation. Yes, indeed! broken-hearted sinners who thirst for salvation from their sins and the Savior of sinners belong together. So it must needs be: the Savior of sinners must be found in the company of penitent sinners, and the Savior of sinners is the man to whom sinners must go. Jesus was sent to be the Savior of sinners and He so conducted Himself towards all penitent sinners coming to Him that the selfrighteous Pharisees shrugged their shoulders and curled their lips scornfully.

Why should we not dispel all dread of Christ and draw nigh unto Him with a cheerful heart, since we know that He is the Friend of sinners? What more could we desire? When walking on earth the Lord conducted Himself so kindly towards penitent sinners that His enemies scornfully said, He must also be a sinner. What greater evidence than this could we ask that the Lord loves sinners and rejoices to see them come to Him? Does your conscience accuse you? Does your own heart con-

denn you? Be not afraid to go to Jesus and to lay your heart full of blood-red sins to His feet. Surely, He will not despise it; for He is the Friend of sinners; even the hardened Pharisees must bear witness to it.

II.

How did the Lord receive these hard sayings of the Pharisees? Did their murmurings and slanderous insinuations perhaps persuade Him to drop His love and friendship for penitent sinners and henceforth to avoid their company in order to save His reputation? No indeed! The slanders of the Pharisees could not extinguish the flame of love burning in His heart. He rather risked the loss of His own reputation, than to have cast out one single penitent coming to Him. He did not even seek to make any apology for His conduct? In the contrary, He presented to the Pharisees a parable in which He describes Himself specially as the Friend of those who have gone astray; for He said: "*What man of you having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.*" Where is the poet able to portray a lovelier picture of the Lord, the Friend and Savior of sinners? A shepherd will not pass it by with indifference if a sheep has strayed away, he will seek it and he will seek it so long until he has either found it or must relinquish all hope of ever finding it again. And when he has found it he will not kill it, neither will he angrily beat it, but with all carefulness he will bring it back to the flock. So does Jesus, the good Shepherd, showing Himself the Seeker and Savior of that which is lost.

Who are these lost ones? By nature all are lost in sin and Christ seeks all, but here the Lord particularly refers to those lost ones who once were in the fold of Christ and have gone astray again. Already in our infancy we were received into the

fold of Christ by baptism and if any, since that time, has turned away from Christ he is one of the lost ones here spoken of. The Lord knows and numbers His own, and if one goes astray He says: 'I must be up, I must seek this stray one lest it perish; I must bring it back to the flock.' If thou hast turned away from the Lord to worship the golden calf or to walk the paths of sin, thou shalt know that the Lord is not sitting idle far above the clouds unconcerned whether thou be astray and when thou mayest plunge down into perdition; nay, but thy Lord is seeking thee.

And Jesus seeks the lost in all the ways offering any prospect of finding them. If He grants days of earthly prosperity to a lost one He means to lead it to repentance by His goodness, but He does also not dread following stray ones on rough and rocky roads, and He frequently tries, if not perhaps afflictions will persuade stray ones to give ear to the voice of their shepherd again. He applies every means to win back the lost, and this He does not one day or one year only, but many days, perhaps many years; for it makes His heart bleed to lose one single one from His fold. Of the twelve disciples this good Shepherd says to His Father: "Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scriptures might be fulfilled." John 17, 12. And how zealously did He seek this son of perdition with admonitions and warnings to the very last hour. Jesus has an eye to His flock and if He sees a place in the fold empty which was filled before His heart constrains Him to walk to and fro, in city and country, in field and forest; He will seek in splendid palaces and in dens of vice, lifting up His voice and crying: 'Return, return, thou backsliding soul,' and when, perhaps after long and wearisome seeking, He does find a lost one, the good Lord has quickly forgotten all the anxiety, labor and trouble it caused Him and He takes it up in His arms and lays it on His shoulders rejoicing. Though a sheep has strayed away never so far and has fallen into never so evil ways, so soon as it turns to its Shepherd He is ready to receive it with open arms; for with a penitent sinner who desires to be rid of his sins the dear Lord

cannot be angry, because of joy over his repentance. Yea, He declares: "*I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.*" If a shepherd, after patient search, finds a lost sheep he momentarily rejoices over that one more than over all the rest of the flock, and, perhaps years after, he will point out that sheep and will tell, how it was once lost and how he found it in a forest infested with wolves, or at the edge of a precipice and how he saved it. The Lord loves His whole flock, but when He wins back a soul which had gone astray it is to Him an occasion of special rejoicing; for this is essentially His office, to seek and to save that which is lost.

This is Jesus whom the Father sent into the world to be the Friend and Savior of sinners. He is not undutiful to His Father; He lifts up His voice, He cries throughout the world: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matt. 11, 28. O hear His voice, forsake your evil way and return unto Him.

III.

His strong desire to win the souls that have gone astray constrained Him to enrich these parables with a special inducement unto repentance, saying: "*Likewise, I say unto you, There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.*" Those shining spirits of light which surround the throne of God are never unhappy that they needed to be made glad, they are ever rejoicing, ever praising God, but the repentance of a sinner is a peculiar occasion of joy to them. Take a boy to a mountain dell and he is happy, but catch him a spotted trout from a sparkling streamlet and he will shout for joy. When the intelligence goes the rounds: 'He weeps, he repents, he turns to the Lord,' it creates a flutter of joy among the happy inhabitants of the celestial realms.

O what a great, great thing is the repentance of a sinner, seeing the angels of heaven rejoice over it. Men may make a great rejoicing over a trifling matter. Whole nations may pom-

pously celebrate an event which at last turns out to have been a national calamity. But the angels of heaven do not make such mistakes. They are never mistaken in their judgment like men so often are. They rejoice only over things which are a real cause for joy. Now because the angels rejoice over a sinner that repents it is evident that repentance is a precious thing. Indeed there is not another occurrence transpiring on earth whereof it is so distinctly said that the angels rejoice over it. Why is this? The reason is obvious. Repentance is the beginning of each individual sinner's salvation. Without repentance no grace; without repentance no part in Christ; without repentance no salvation. Therefore the repentance of one sinner is a greater cause of joy to the holy angels than aught else transpiring among men.

Here is a truth worth studying, a subject worthy of earnest meditation. If we preserve the sayings of wise men, if we give heed to the judgment of the prudent and the experienced of this world, here is more than the wisdom of man. Here the Lord of heaven tells us the judgment of the angels of heaven as to what is the most important thing for us mortals to do. The angels are capable of passing a sound judgment; for they are the highest intelligences of all God's creatures. They are in a situation to know what is for our true welfare. They know the felicities of heaven and the torments of the damned in the pit of destruction. They know that man has an immortal soul which through death passes into a fixed estate. The angels know that there is no salvation for sinners save alone in Jesus Christ. Therefore they sang at His birth, ministered to Him in the days of His flesh and made heaven resound with their shouts of triumph at His ascension. The angels know that the only way for man to obtain part in Christ's salvation is by repenting of sin and appealing to the blood of Christ for the cleansing from sin. The angels know that they can carry the soul washed by the blood of the Lamb to the abode of bliss, but the soul not tinged with the blood of Christ remains in the clutches of the prince of darkness. All this the angels know full well, and the Lord records their judgment and says: "*Likewise, I say*

unto you, There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

O that these words were engraven in our hearts with a diamond pencil! O that they were before our eyes continually! Would you rejoice the heart of Jesus, the Lamb sacrificed for you? Repent of sin. Would you cause joy to the angels of heaven? Repent of sin. Would you have the angels your companions watching over you day and night? Repent of sin. Would you have the angels carry your soul to the mansion prepared for you in the house of the Father? Repent of sin. Repent daily. Walk in repentance, seeking the cleansing of your soul in the blood of Jesus night and morning. Herein abide, and the angels will be round about you knowing you an heir of salvation, and they will hover over your deathbed and with songs of triumph they will conduct your soul to that city fair and high where is the tabernacle of God and the Lamb.
AMEN.

IV. SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

TEXT: Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal, it shall be measured to you again. And he spake a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch? The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye. Luke 6, 36-42.

The Gospel before us does not treat of justification before God; it does not tell us how we sinners are justified and saved, but it enumerates a list of Christian works and virtues which we Christians are to practice upon earth. Now by our works we cannot be justified and saved, because by them we can earn nothing before God. Our works do not make God richer, greater and more glorious than He is. Though we could do all commanded us we would earn nothing from God, even as the Lord declares: "When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." Luke 17, 10. If a bondman faithfully performs what is commanded him he is only doing his bounden duty and he does not earn his liberty; so if we would do all commanded us we would only be doing our duty, for which God would owe us nothing. Because we can earn nothing by our works it is certain, we cannot be saved by them. We are saved alone by God's works which He performed in Christ Jesus. In Him God has prepared salvation for us,

and this is our salvation that Christ's merits are imputed unto us through faith. Before God nothing can justify us save alone the blood and death of His Son. These we must bring before God, and our own works we must leave out.

But does not this text teach salvation by our works, when it distinctly declares: "*Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.*" Is not this clearly saying, if we do not judge or condemn, we shall be free from the judgment of condemnation? Is not here the promise, if we forgive others, God will forgive us? So it is written, and there are a great many similar passages in the Bible. Every way the law says: "This do, and thou shalt live." Luke 10, 28. The law promises life under the condition that we do it, but there is no man on earth who can fulfill that condition. Our text says: "*Be ye merciful, as your Father also is merciful.*" Our mercifulness will justify us provided we are perfectly merciful as God is, but our mercifulness is imperfect and worth nothing in the court of Divine justice. Because we cannot fulfill the condition of the law there can be no salvation for us in the promise of the law. We must look for salvation to Him whom the Father sent to fulfill the law for us; for of Him the Scriptures testify: "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Gal. 4, 4. Therefore the Lord does not at all mean to say that we should earn salvation by doing the things which He names in this text, but He would say: 'In me, your Redeemer and Mediator, God is become a merciful Father unto you who forgives your sins and will not judge and condemn you. Go therefore and show that you appreciate the mercy of your Father by acting towards your fellow-men as your Father does towards you.' Because God gives us salvation gratis in Christ, therefore we should do these things, not to earn salvation, but freely, willingly, from thankfulness, as such who already possess salvation in Christ.

Because in Christ we are exempt from the judgment of condemnation let us ever bear in mind:

THE CHRISTIAN'S DUTY TO REFRAIN FROM UNCHARITABLY
JUDGING AND CONDEMNING OTHERS.

Let us examine

- I. What judging and condemning is allowed and commanded;
- II. What judging and condemning is forbidden; and
- III. What should persuade us to live up to this duty.

I.

In the 2d chapter of his second epistle St. Paul writes to Timothy, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Paul declares, if Timothy would rightly divide the Word of truth he would be a workman approved of God, and unto this Paul exhorts him, writing: "Study to show thyself approved unto God." This is one of the most indispensably necessary qualities of a good preacher: he must be able to distinguish doctrines and to apply them rightly. A preacher who mixes up everything will certainly not advance his hearers much in knowledge. A preacher must be able to distinguish doctrines and to assign to each its proper place, otherwise he is no approved workman, not fit to be a preacher. If a farmer puts out a field with wheat, barley, oats, corn, cabbage all mixed up and will put in a quantity of thistle seed and weeds he will not make much of a harvest. If a man mixes up every thing in the Bible, law and Gospel, faith and works, that which is commanded and that which is forbidden, and will put in an ingredient of his own notions, of the current ideas of the times and the traditions of men, he will certainly not advance far in true, divine, biblical knowledge. In order to grow in the knowledge of the truth we must learn to distinguish the doctrines, must leave them in their proper place and must preserve them as God has given them.

A very plain example for the importance of distinguishing sharply presents itself in the application of these words: "*Judge not, condemn not.*" Many apply the words so as to

say: No church should condemn the doctrines of another, and no one should be bound to any certain creed, but every one should be left perfectly free to believe just what he pleases. Now in as far as the civil government is concerned this principle is right and good; for to the civil authorities all creeds are to be alike, provided they do not violate common morality. But we must distinguish between the civil and the Divine court. It does not follow that what is allowed in the civil is also right in the Divine court; for the Lord makes a distinction when He commands: "Render unto Cæsar, the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God, the things that are God's." Matt. 22, 21.

Why is it that people can make so palpably wrong an application of these words? It is because they do not distinguish truth from truth, but mix up that which is forbidden and that which is commanded. There is a judging and condemning which is forbidden and a judging and condemning which is commanded of God, and these two we must keep separate, otherwise we will call the vile precious and the precious vile.

What judging and condemning is allowed and commanded? In the first place, all official judging and condemning, as that of the civil government which has the office to judge and to condemn. When Jehoshaphat appointed judges in the cities of Judah he said unto them: "Take heed what ye do; for ye judge not for man, but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment." 2 Chr. 19, 6. When, therefore, a judge pronounces sentence the condemned culprit cannot appeal to the words: "*Judge not, condemn not.*" An official judging and condemning is also that of a minister, when he judges and condemns sins and pernicious doctrines. To do both is a minister's sacred office; for touching the first, Paul writes: "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear," 1 Tim. 5, 20, and concerning the rebuking and condemning of false doctrines and opinions of men the same apostle charges Titus with great earnestness: "Rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith; not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men, that turn from the truth." Ch. 1, 13. Indeed, the office of a preacher is of such a nature that it is a thing impossible

for him even to preach one single sermon without judging and condemning, unless he fills out his time talking of politics, or science, or relating fables, which, in fact, is not preaching. If I preach: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned," Mark 16, 16, I am judging and condemning all those who do not believe and will not be baptized. If I preach: "Thieves shall not inherit the kingdom of God," 1 Cor. 6, 10, I am condemning all those who seek after gain by unfair dealings and dishonest practices. If I preach concerning the torments of the damned: "Their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched," Is. 66, 24, I am judging and condemning all those doctrines by which the everlasting punishment of the wicked is denied. Yet when a preacher preaches the truth of God it is in reality not he that judges and condemns, but the Word; it is the "two-edged sword, a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Hebr. 4, 12.

Besides this official judging and condemning there is a judging commanded to all Christians. Of it Paul writes to the Corinthians: "I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say. 1 Cor. 10, 15. And in this text the Lord, speaking in a parable, says: *"Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch? The disciple is not above his master; but every one that is perfect, shall be as his master."* As the master is, so will the pupil be. Every one is to exercise care that in matters of faith he does not like a blind man follow a blind leader, but by the written Word of God a Christian is to judge, whether the preacher he hears preaches the truth of God, and if he does not a Christian is to avoid him as a blind leader, as St. John commands in his 2d epistle: "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed, is partaker of his evil deeds." If all Christians were diligent to examine every sermon they hear by the written Word of God, and would avoid those bringing doctrines contrary to it, then Christendom would not be split up into so many sectlets and would not be so full of all manner of doctrines.

Still another kind of judging the Lord indicates when He says at the end of this text: "*Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye.*" When a Christian sees a brother in the faith sin or err from the truth it should be a reminder to him to examine himself and to judge, if not perhaps a greater fault is found in himself. After judging himself he should in so far judge of his brother's word or act as to go to him and admonish him and so seek to better him.

These are the kinds of judging which are not only allowed, but are commanded in God's Word. Sin and error must be rebuked and condemned wherever it is found, though it be in father or mother, sister or brother.

II.

What now is the judging and condemning which the Lord here forbids? We may comprise it in this general definition: It is all judging where we have no business and no calling to judge, and all judging and condemning by which the law of brotherly love and charity is violated. It embraces all which is forbidden in the eighth commandment: "*Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.*" It is not possible to enumerate all the ways in which this judging and condemning is practiced. There are many who will criticise everybody except themselves, who will belittle every thing except what they themselves have and do. There are people who must pass their soiling judgment on every act of every body, whose tongue, as St James 3, 6, writes, is "*a fire, a world of iniquity, and is set on fire of hell.*" There are people whose tongues you cannot escape, they will have their say about you. Let a man do whatever he please, people given to the habit of judging and condemning others will take occasion to speak evil of him. If a man does good works they must belittle them as though they were nothing, or he must be a hypocrite doing good only for a show. If a man does what is innocent in itself, but might also be evil, they are quick in putting the worst construction on his actions. If a man does become guilty of a fault they will talk of him as a most desper-

ate character. If something damaging to another's character could well be kept secret they are busy in spreading it abroad. In every community there are persons who know no greater delight, than to talk of and to pass their judgment on the sins and faults of others. Of such it may well be said that they love to handle filth and to make it more filthy.

A Christian is to do the contrary of all this. In his heart he is to think well of others as long as possible, as the prophet commands: "Let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbor." Zech. 8, 17. A Christian should speak well of others, and when he sees dubious behavior on the part of another, he should put the most charitable construction on it and should not throw suspicion upon him, as the apostle commands: "Speak not evil one of another, brethren." Jas. 4, 11. On uncertain grounds or on hearsay a Christian must condemn no one, and if another is addicted to an evil habit, or has been guilty of a sin, a Christian must be careful not to exaggerate it. Neither should a Christian by being silent permit another to be condemned innocently, or to be slandered without a cause, but he should be ready to do what Solomon commands: "Open thy mouth for the dumb. Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy." Prov. 31, 8. We Christians should much rather think of our own sins and faults than those of others, and we should choose more useful subjects to converse on than to be talking evil of those that are absent.

Neither should we ever presume to judge of others as to whether they are true believers or hypocrites. God has commanded us to judge of the doctrine, to condemn errors and to reprove the works of darkness, but He has not commanded us to judge over the hearts of our brethren. St. Paul rather writes: "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth." Rom. 14, 4. We must leave to God that judgment which He has reserved unto Himself, as it is written: "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." 2 Tim. 2, 19. To God alone belongs the judgment over the

heart, because He alone sees "the reins and the heart." We can judge only by a man's profession and deeds. Of those who make no profession of Christ and those who, though professing to be Christians, do not depart from iniquity, we know that they are not Christians, but over the hearts of those who profess Christ and who outwardly behave like Christians it is not our office to judge; that is God's office who alone knows the upright from the hypocrites. Of us charity requires that we regard all our brothers and sisters true Christians, unless their words and deeds prove the contrary. Here applies the Word: "*Judge not, condemn not.*"

III.

And many are the reasons which should persuade us to live up to this Christian duty. The primary one is the mercy of God toward us. God had compassion of us and spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all. "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved." John 3, 17. To be children of the merciful Father in heaven we must not give our mouth to evil, or let our tongue frame deceit, but must walk in compassion and love. As God has been merciful to you, be merciful to others and do them no harm in their reputation.

This Jesus Christ whom the Father of mercy sent into the world to save us from the judgment of condemnation, here lays before us commands and promises, and has said: "*With the same measure that ye mete withal, it shall be measured to you again.*" Here is a very simple rule by which you can judge what your reward will be. As we do to others so will it be done to us, and of judging the Lord specially says Matthew 7: "With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged." If you pass a hard judgment on your neighbor and your tongue deals with him mercilessly, a merciless judgment shall be pronounced on you. The three friends of Job accused him of hypocrisy without a cause, and in the last chapter the Lord says to Eliphaz: "My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends," and the same Job, whom they had so unjustly con-

demned had to pray for them that the wrath of God was turned from them. Of Babylon, the kingdom of antichrist, it is said: "Reward her even as she rewarded you." Rev. 18, 6. Whatever you cry into the mountain hollow, the echo will come back to you, a curse or a blessing. If a woman is a gossip and gives every body a brush with her tongue she will soon be in every body's mouth. It is the natural result: If Ishmael's hand is against every man every man's hand will be against Ishmael. Haman was hanged on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai. Adoni-bezek had his thumbs and his toes cut off the same as he had done to seventy others, and he confessed: "As I have done so God hath requited me." Judg. 1, 7. The slanderer will have no end of quarrels, but "he that will love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile." 1 Pet. 3, 10. No one is inclined to help a close-fisted miser, but a charitable and liberal man will find a helper in time of need. Retribution will come home to those who measure out evil to others, if not in this life, yet surely on the day when God will judge men according to the deeds done in the body, but then also a cup of cold water which is given for the love of Jesus will not remain unrewarded.

Peculiarly worthy of note are the words: "*Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.*" These words correspond with the fifth petition of the Lord's prayer: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." There is nothing more diametrically opposed to true Christianity than to have an unforgiving heart. For this the Scriptures glorify God that there is forgiveness with Him. For this the Son of God shed His blood that our sins might be forgiven. What heart therefore could be farther away from Christ than that which is not willing to forgive? We are so to walk as to be ready to forgive those who trespass against us. What could be more Godlike, seeing God takes such great delight in forgiving? We need forgiveness every day, not only with God, but others also must have forbearance with our faults and shortcomings. Indeed, we but too often have a beam in our own eye while we are offended at the mote in another's eye. Let us therefore be very careful how we

judge and condemn others, lest on the day of judgment, when the secrets of the hearts are brought to light, we be found companions of the Pharisees who strained at gnats and swallowed camels.

Called in Jesus Christ unto the forgiveness of our sins, we are called to follow Him. Let us prove ourselves true disciples of our Master. As He walked in pure and immaculate love, going about and doing good, so let us walk in love to one another, seeking the good and the salvation both of friend and foe.

AMEN.

V. SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

TEXT: And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, and saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And he entered one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship. Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering, said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing; nevertheless, at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken: and so was also James and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not: from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.—Luke 5, 1-11.

True godliness cannot be half-measurism: It cannot be a division of the heart, so that a part only is given to God and a part reserved from Him. Whosoever would be a disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ must be fully decided for Christ. The Christian will be industrious in performing the duties of his earthly calling; he will love father, mother, sister, brother, but the most precious treasure which his heart knows is Jesus Christ. In St. Paul we have an instructive example, illustrating this truth; for he writes: "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Gal. 2, 20. When Paul was converted to the Lord, Jesus became the Lord of his life and the life of his soul. Jesus lived in him

through faith, and because Paul knew that Jesus had given Himself into death in order that he, Paul, should be justified from sin and should have everlasting life, therefore the highest, the all-absorbing desire of his heart was to be with Jesus, to serve Him and to glorify His name on the earth. Jesus was his love, his desire, his one and all, or, as Paul himself expresses it more forcibly, Jesus lived in him and he lived in the faith of the Son of God. All his desires, thoughts and studies were devoted to the honor and service of Christ. Yet this did not prevent Paul from performing works pertaining to the life in this world; he labored with his hands to gain the necessary means of sustenance. But even when laboring at his trade he did it to be the more enabled to glorify Christ, as he writes: "Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Phil. 1, 20. Christ was all his life. He lived not unto sin, not unto the world, not unto himself; all his life was unto Christ and for Christ.

It is similar with every true Christian. The believer's soul is no more like unto a butterfly flitting from flower to flower without a permanent resting place. Even though the Christian be weak in the faith, yet he is decided for Christ. The choice of his heart is fixed; his soul knows of nothing which would compare with Christ; to him Jesus is the best, the sweetest, the most desirable. His heart fully and freely consents to the poet when he says:

Take Thou all away from me,
I shall still thus minded be,
Thou who madest me Thine own
Shalt be all my joy alone.

Placed before the alternative, either to lose property, family, life, all, or to renounce Christ, he would surrender all and abide with Jesus. This is exemplified in the martyrs, missionaries and all who suffer persecution for the truth of God. When it comes to denying or confessing Christ the Christian will refuse to do the very least thing which would imply a denial of his Lord. The ancient martyrs rather suffered death by fire than

to burn one single grain of incense to the image of Cæsar. Athanasius went into banishment five times rather than subscribe the one false phrase that the Son is of similar, but not of the same essence with the Father. The reason for this to the unbeliever so exceedingly strange devotion is, because every true Christian has done in his heart what Peter and Andrew, James and John did when they forsook all to follow Christ. Permit me to-day briefly to speak on:

FORSAKING ALL AND FOLLOWING CHRIST.

- I. What the Christian must forsake;
- II. How he must forsake it; and
- III. Why he must forsake all.

I.

This Gospel narrates three occurrences in connection: the Lord's preaching to the multitude, the miraculous draught of fishes and the calling of four disciples. Because of the signs which He had performed at Capernaum such a multitude of people came to the Lord at the sea of Galilee that He was in danger of being crowded into the water. Therefore He stepped into a boat belonging to Simon Peter and from it He preached to the people. That wonderful draught of fishes was intended by the Lord to demonstrate the truth of His doctrine and to prepare those fishermen to accept His calling. Let us weigh well the action of those men.

Four disciples were called by the Lord on this occasion. Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, is not named in the text, but from Mark we learn that he was with Peter in the boat and was called together with him. This was not the first time they met the Lord; they had seen Him before. John, the Baptist, had directed them to Him, and they had believed John's testimony of Jesus. Therefore when they saw the miracle here described—for they as experienced fishermen well knew that it was not something natural to enclose so many fishes at noontide in deep water—when they saw this miracle and the Lord bade them follow Him, they were immediately ready to forsake all. They

did not say: 'Come again next year'; they did not tarry; they rowed to the shore and went with the Lord, as the text clearly says: "*And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.*"

What did those men forsake? "*They forsook all,*" says the text. They did not first institute a sale of their property; they did not ask for time to take the two boats full of fishes which they had caught to market; neither do we read that they first went to Capernaum to take leave of their kinsfolk and friends; they stepped out of their boats and followed the Lord. When the Lord bade them follow Him they did not consult with flesh and blood, nothing could hold them, they went with Him.

But what does the word "*all*" comprise? What did they possess that they could forsake it? Some one whose heart is with his possessions might perhaps argue that they had nothing, or very little to forsake, else they would not have done it. They were fishermen and riches they did not possess, yet they were not beggars. They had their fishing crafts, nets and trade by which they gained their livelihood. Peter had a family at Capernaum; for we read that Christ healed his mother-in-law of the fever, and perhaps Peter owned a house or hut in the same city. Zebedee, the father of James and John, was wealthy enough to hire servants; for St. Mark tells us that his sons left him in the ship with "the hired servants." It was not because they possessed nothing that those men were so ready to follow the Lord, otherwise the Evangelists could not have written: "*They forsook all.*" One that has nothing cannot forsake anything. Whether a man possess much or little he cannot do more than forsake all, and we know that the little which a poor man owns is as needful to him as their wealth is to the rich.

One thing particularly worthy of note we must not overlook in the text, namely, that Peter forsook, that is subordinated his own will, knowledge and experience to the word of the Lord. Peter knew when and where to cast the net with a prospect of success. He was well aware that it was an unreasonable thing and against fishing rules to cast the net at midday in deep water, and seeing another man fishing in this way he would likely have

smiled at him; yet when the Lord told him to do it he said: "*Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing; nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.*" He meant to say, in the most favorable time they had toiled in vain and in the nature of things there was now much less prospect, yet what the Lord desired should be done. At the word of the Lord this practiced fisherman set aside his knowledge of his own trade and did that which otherwise he would have thought a waste of time and labor.

This is what a man must forsake in order to follow Christ: "*All.*" Peter and Andrew, James and John forsook all: property, relatives, friends, their own will and knowledge, everything which would have separated them from Christ. We must forsake all, or we can be none of Christ's own; for He solemnly declares: "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." Luke 14, 33. That is plain language: either we must forsake all, or we cannot be Christ's disciples. Not enough is it to forsake some things, it must be all. To stop half way will never do. When king Saul was sent to destroy the Amalekites together with all their possessions and returned to Gilgal after a victorious campaign he greeted Samuel with the words: "Blessed be thou of the Lord: I have performed the commandment of the Lord." 1 Sam. 15, 13. But Samuel replied: "What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" And when Saul said: "The people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed," Samuel announced to him: "Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king." Saul thought he was making a very justifiable exception which would be pleasing in heaven, but when the Lord said all He meant all. Even so here. Either you must forsake all, or Christ will not acknowledge you.

Shall the husband forsake the wife and the son the father? Must not man have food and raiment? How can a man forsake all? That is our second question: *How the Christian must forsake all.*

II.

Those four men forsook all and followed Christ, and if we would be Christ's we must do likewise. Therefore it is important to understand how, in what manner this is to be done. Monks and nuns claim that they are doing what the apostles did. And many do forsake property and friends to go to a monastery, and in this they have "a form of godliness," but that they do what the apostles did is not true. By going to a monastery they are not following Christ; for He did not live in the cell of a cloister. Neither does the true faith of Christ dwell in their hearts; for their object is to earn heaven by their own good works which is the contrary of following Christ. They therefore in fact deny Christ, because to do good works in order to earn heaven is as much as saying that Christ has not earned heaven for us. Moreover, the majority of those becoming monks find a better and easier life in the cloister than they had before. If a person with plenty to eat and to drink spends his life in idleness instead of rearing a family with much care and hard labor, and that man nevertheless persuades himself that he is forsaking all for Christ's sake he is laboring under a strong delusion. So those disciples did not do. They did not even give away their property, they kept it as their own; for after the Lord's resurrection they returned to their usual occupation. Those men so forsook all that when the Lord called them they dropped their oars and went with Him, showing that their hearts were more with the Lord than with their possessions. Whether others would take care of their property or not that could not prevent them. Though the fish they had caught might spoil, the boats sink, the nets rot, they went to walk with the Lord. So every one desiring to be Christ's must forsake all that the love and longing of his soul is with Jesus Christ and no more with that which is in the world. In two ways did the disciples forsake all: first with the heart that they loved Christ above all that they had in this world, and thereafter in deed, when as the Lord's apostles they went forth to preach the Gospel. The latter is not required of us, at least not of every one, but the former is required of us that we turn our affections away

from what we have in the world unto the Lord. We must so forsake all and follow Christ that He is our first and highest love, and all other things become a secondary matter to us. So decided for Christ must our hearts be that, were we placed before the alternative to choose, we would be gladly ready to do what those Jews did of whom it is written: "Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance." Heb. 10, 34.

We must forsake all, yet not all in the same manner. Some things we must forsake totally if we would be Christ's. Totally we must forsake sin; for he that committeth sin knowingly and willingly is of the devil and not of Christ. Totally we must forsake our self-will and self-wisdom, and must be guided alone by the Word of the Lord, as we here see Peter subject himself to the Lord's behest, though it must have appeared foolish to him. Totally we must forsake all doubts and scruples concerning God's gracious will toward us, so that we may not do as Peter did, saying: "*Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord,*" but rather say: 'Come nigh unto me, O Lord, to forgive me my sins and to cleanse me from mine iniquities; for Thou art the Savior of sinners.' Other things we must forsake with the heart and yet keep them for use in this world. They are all those things which belong to the support and wants of this bodily life, as we find them enumerated in the explanation of the fourth petition. What God has given us in this world we should use to His honor, enjoying it with a grateful heart, but we must not set the heart's love and trust upon it. Temporal gifts we ought to possess as loaned to us for a time only, being always ready to surrender them again at the will of Him that gave them.

The highest crown and treasure of the Christian's heart is Jesus, his Savior, in whom he has the forgiveness of his sins. Sin is an abomination to him and his own will he subjects to the will and Word of God, so that it alone is the rule of his faith and life. In regard to the things of this world the Christian is so minded that he would rather lose all on earth than to give up Jesus. If we trust and love Jesus above all other things,

then have we forsaken all to follow Him; then are we ready to say with Asaph: "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." Ps. 73, 25.

III.

Why is forsaking all so necessary? why so necessary to withdraw the soul's affections from all other things? Why must those four men forsake all? Simply because if they had remained with their fishing nets they could not have walked with Jesus. Even so every one who will not forsake all in the manner described cannot be Christ's. Christ will not dwell in a divided heart. The whole heart must be yielded to Him or He will not abide in it. He wants the first place in the heart and if that is not given He stays away. St. James distinctly asserts this when he writes: "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." Ch. 4, 4. That word will close the gates of heaven against many who thought to do both, follow Christ and yet persist in the love of the world and that which is in the world. So long as a man still has something which he would not give up for Christ's sake, so long the heart has not yet truly forsaken all and Christ does not dwell in it.

This is illustrated in the Scriptures in many ways. If a man professes himself willing to adopt the whole Scripture except in one point he is not willing to submit himself to the Word, he cannot be Christ's; for by the prophet Hosea 4, 6 the Lord says: "Because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee," and King Saul was rejected, because he failed to obey the command of the Lord in one particular. If a man intends to do right in all things, but there is one sin in which he intends to persist, he cannot be Christ's; for He says: "If ye love me, keep my commandments." John 14, 15. In that wealthy youth of whom it is said "Jesus beholding him loved him," we have an instructive example. When the Lord recounted the commandments to him he answered: "All these things have I kept from my youth up; what lack I yet?" Matt. 19, 20. This young man was no hypocrite, he had honestly and earnestly

striven to walk in the commandments; but the Lord said unto him: "One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and come, take up the cross, and follow me." This one thing the young man was not willing to do and he could not be the Lord's disciple. One thing preferred above Christ will keep Him distant from the heart. He alone can be the Lord's disciple to whom Jesus is dearer than thousands of gold and silver.

With great solemnity does the Lord declare this when He says: "If any man come to me, and hateth not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." Luke 14, 26. Is not the son to love his father and the husband his wife? Indeed they are, but the Lord is here speaking of that holy hate with which the Christian must and does hate any and everything which would separate him from Christ, the Beloved of his soul. The Christian must therefore frequently both love and hate one and the same person. The pious son of a wicked father will love him and yet the evil-doer cannot but be hateful to him. In the law Moses commanded: "If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him: but thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be the first upon him to put him to death." Deut. 13, 6. However tenderly the Israelite loved his wife, if she attempted to seduce him to idolatry he was to hate her and hate her with such a holy hatred as to lift the first stone against her. In like manner Paul hated the Jews as enemies of the Gospel and he loved them as his kinsmen. The heart must so adhere unto Jesus Christ that we count His enemies our enemies, and count them the more dangerous to our soul the nearer and dearer they are to us in this world.

To forsake all and cleave unto Christ, to deny one's self and follow Him, is something which demands a continuous bat-

ting against our own flesh and natural inclination. Therefore we should often consider that parable in which the Lord speaks of a man who, intending to build a tower, first counts the costs that he might not become an object of derision to the passers-by. Once having set out to follow Christ we should ever again sit and count the costs that at the latter end the devils mock us not saying: "This man began to build, and was not able to finish." Luke 14, 30. Forsaking all trust in our own ability we must look for all things alone unto Him who says: "*Follow me.*" Having chosen Him for our Captain let us in all temptations be ever ready to say with Peter: "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe, and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." John 6, 68. They that are so minded are they of whom it will be said: "*They forsook all, and followed him.*" AMEN.

VI. SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

TEXT : For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill ; and whosoever shall kill, shall be in danger of the judgment : but I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment : and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council ; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire. Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way ; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way with him ; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily, I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.—Matt. 5, 20-27.

“ Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds,” thus writes St. Jude. At the appointed time God will come to execute judgment upon all the wicked for all their wicked deeds, and this judgment God will execute through Jesus Christ, as Paul preached to the Athenians, saying: “ God hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained,” Acts 17, 31, that is by Jesus Christ, and in proof thereof Paul added: “ Whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.” The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the conclusive evidence, that God will judge the world and that the judgment will be executed by Jesus Christ. Because Jesus Christ humbled Himself and took upon Him the sins of the world, bearing them in His own body on the tree, therefore God exalted Him and

ordained Him the judge of the world, to deliver His people from the power of death, to take vengeance on those who, after He has redeemed them with His blood, believe not on Him, despising His labor for them. As surely as Christ died in the sins of the world, rose again and ascended to heaven, even so surely will He also perform the last act of the work committed to Him and will come again unto judgment.

This Jesus Christ is ordained judge of the world. Not the Jews only or the Greeks, nor alone the nations walking in idolatry, the world will be summoned to judgment. Neither will He pronounce judgment upon all nations in one mass, so that the individual might hope to remain hid in the vast multitude, that his deeds of darkness would not be set in light before God and the angels, He will separate them and will summon each one individually to answer for his deeds done upon earth; for St. Paul does not only write, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ," he also adds: "That every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." 2 Cor. 5, 10. In vain do men comfort themselves that their deeds are hidden in darkness; there is a day coming in the which every man will be obliged to step forth into the light and all will see what he is.

Jesus Christ is ordained to judge the world in righteousness. He is a righteous judge who will judge with righteousness. His sentence will be righteous, and righteousness He will seek in those whom He judges. Those in whom He finds that righteousness which He seeks He will pronounce heirs of the kingdom, and those whom He finds without this righteousness He will banish from His countenance forever.

WHAT IS THAT RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH WILL AVAIL BEFORE GOD IN THE DAY OF JUDGMENT?

To set this forth let me propose two questions:

I. Will the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees be found valid before God?

II. What is that righteousness which exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees?

I.

Will the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees avail before God? "*For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.*" The Lord does not deny *all* righteousness to the scribes and Pharisees. He does not say that they were vicious men walking in manifold and manifest sins and vices. He concedes that they had a certain kind, or a certain measure of righteousness, but he denies that the righteousness which they had was sufficient to entitle them to an entrance into the kingdom of heaven; for He declares, to enter into the kingdom of heaven our righteousness must exceed, must be greater, better, than the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

What righteousness did the scribes and Pharisees possess?

The scribes were those men among the Jews who had studied theology, and whose duty it was to expound the law and the prophets. At the time of Christ the scribes either belonged to the Pharisees, or were of the same mind as these. The Pharisees were a sect among the Jews which is said to have sprung up about 150 years before Christ. To this sect Paul belonged before his conversion to Christ, and in his defense before king Agrippa he calls the Pharisees "the most straitest sect of our (the Jewish) religion," Acts 26, 5. And such they were; for they wanted to keep both the law of Moses and the traditions of the elders. The foremost principle of this sect was: if a man would be saved he must keep the law. Salvation by the works of the law comprehensively describes the doctrine and religion of the Pharisees.

While teaching salvation by keeping the law the Pharisees were not Perfectionists. They could not deny and did not pretend to deny that no man can prevent evil thoughts from arising in his heart and that none can abstain from sinful lustings. Therefore they divided the law into two parts: great and small commandments. Their great commandments comprised words and acts, the small thoughts and lusts. Agreeably to this division of the commandments the Pharisees declared it sufficient

unto righteousness before God, if a man would keep the great commandments, that is if a man would abstain from breaking the law by word or deed he would be justified before God, even though inwardly he could not and would not abstain from evil thoughts and lusts. The import of this doctrine of the Pharisees was the same as the common idea entertained by so many people, if a man would do the best he could, God would accept him and would ask no more of him.

The doctrine of the Pharisees therefore had the tendency to make them self-conceited hypocrites and such, on an average, they were. They made a great show of piety, dressed in long, somber garments, made long prayers, distributed alms in public places and they loved to occupy the prominent seats in the synagogue, but in their hearts there was no true fear of God. If you wish to know in what unqualified terms Christ denounced both the doctrine and the hypocrisy of the Pharisees of His days, read the 23d chapter of Matthew. They were hypocrites who outwardly had the form of godliness, but were not sincerely in earnest about it, and that the righteousness of such hypocrites avails nothing before God needs no proof.

Yet we must not think that the Pharisees were all hypocrites. The name "Pharisee" has become a by-word, so that, whenever we hear it, we are accustomed to think of a man who purposely puts on a mask of piety to hide his wickedness. But we must not forget that the Pharisees were the strictest sect among the Jews, and amongst them were many sincere and upright men. Nicodemus was not a hypocrite, neither was Saul. On an average the Romish monks are hypocrites, but there are some sincere men among them. Martin Luther, when a monk, was not a hypocrite. He bent his whole soul on securing righteousness before God by monastic works of piety. Concerning his life when a Pharisee Paul writes: "I profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers." Gal. 1, 14. There were those among the Pharisees who sincerely, from heart and soul strove for righteousness in the works of the law, and there were such who reached blameless-

ness before men, as Paul says of himself that he was "touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." Phil. 3, 6.

Was perhaps the righteousness of the upright among the Pharisees available before God? Indeed not; for the Lord here distinctly tells us, to enter the kingdom of heaven our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. He does not say, of the hypocrites among the Pharisees, but in general "*of the Pharisees.*" To stand before God we must have a greater, a better righteousness, than the best among the Pharisees had. That is certainly rejecting all Pharisaic righteousness as unavailing before God.

Why is the righteousness of the Pharisees rejected? The reason is twofold. In the first place, they were corrupters of the law by their doctrine, teaching a way in which no man could be saved. Teaching men to seek righteousness in the outward works of the law they were blind leaders of the blind and could not but fall into the ditch. Therefore the Lord cried out upon them: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering, to go in." Matt. 23, 13. How could the righteousness of those be pleasing to God of whom the law says: "Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way"? Deut. 27, 18. Any one who deliberately corrupts, alters or sets aside God's law, or any part or particle of that law, can surely not be acceptable with God.

In the second place, the Pharisees, though they kept the law outwardly according to the letter, failed to keep it inwardly in its full import and meaning. In the chapter before us the Lord says: "Verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." For righteousness before God all the law must be fulfilled, and any one violating one jot or one tittle of it has failed to keep it, and falls under the condemnation of the law, just as well as another who has broken all the commandments in the most flagrant manner imaginable. This is evident from the words of the Lord when He here introduces the fifth com-

mandment, saying: "*Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill, shall be in danger of the judgment.*" The Pharisees taught, if a man had done no bodily harm to another he had sufficiently kept this commandment and would escape damnation, even though he had a spiteful and unforgiving heart. But what does the Lord say? "*But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire.*" Every one who is angry with another in his heart, or speaks an offensive word against him, even though he but call him Raca, a vain fellow, without a righteous cause, breaks the fifth commandment and it consigns him to the place of torment.

On the duty of ensuing peace the Lord says: "*Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.*" If a man has wronged another, or has given him just cause to be offended, and yet is not willing to go to him and ask pardon, he does not do what the fifth commandment requires, and that man's gifts to God are all abomination, because obedience is better than sacrifice. Concerning the willingness to forgive the Lord says: "*Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.*" If another has sinned against you and asks your pardon, but you do not forgive, or do not so forgive as God forgives that the thing is buried and kept in remembrance no more, then you fail to come up to the requirement of the fifth commandment and it condemns you to everlasting imprisonment. Does not this utterly cut off the righteousness of the Pharisees? They were corrupters of the law, setting aside just the weightier matters as something un-

important and unnecessary, and even those among them who did what is in the power of man to do, failed to keep all.

Is it then not true, if a man will do the best he can, he will be accepted and nothing more will be required of him? I answer: That saying is a snare by which Satan catches and destroys the souls of men. Among the Pharisees were those who did do what they could, but the Lord says, our righteousness must exceed theirs, we must do more than they to be found righteous in our keeping of the law. You say: I want to do it and would like to keep all, and should my honest attempt be of no value? I answer: Wanting to do it is not enough; it must be done, and with liking to do it the law is not satisfied; it says: "This do." You say: But I try to do it. I answer: What is trying? It must be accomplished. Many a drowning man tried to save himself and sank into the deep. Do you say: But I cannot do it, and how can God demand me to do what I cannot do, and then condemn me for not doing it. I might give reasons justifying God, but wherefore? Here is the simple fact, God has given His law and this law says: This do, or thou art condemned, and no man's muttering about it will alter this fact. The law knows of no leniency; it does not 'give a little and take a little'; it stands like an adamant rock, declaring: You come up to this mark, and if you fail, even though by a hair's breadth only, you must sink down to perdition. The law takes no regard of it whether we are able to do it or not. Thousands upon thousands striving to keep the law have day after day sighed: I cannot; "when I would do good, evil is present with me;" Rom. 7, 21; but the law has no ear for such complaints. It knows nothing of compassion for the weak or mercy for the struggling; it cuts straight through and says: "Cursed is every one that continueth not *in all things* which are written in the book of the law to do them." Gal. 3, 10. Without any distinction the law pronounces the curse on them that have not done it. If therefore we would not lose our souls we must beware of hoping for righteousness in our keeping the law as did the Pharisees; for they failed to keep it all, and their hope was idle. We must rather inquire after that

righteousness which *exceeds* the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. What is that better, greater righteousness?

II.

What that greater righteousness is which the Lord here means we must gather from the connection in which the words stand. The whole passage reads thus: "Verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do, and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. *For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed,*" etc. The righteousness which avails before God is to keep the whole law without violating one jot or tittle of it, to do the commandments perfectly from the greatest to the least; it is perfection according to the law. Now we have heard that no man can keep all the law. Who then can be saved? According to the law no man can be saved; for from the law we can make no other conclusion than this: No man can be saved who has not kept the whole law; but no man can keep the whole law; therefore no man can be saved. In other words, no man can enter the kingdom of heaven who has not a better righteousness in the law than the scribes and Pharisees had; but in the law no man can have a better righteousness than they; therefore no man can enter into the kingdom of heaven. That cuts off from heaven you and me and all men, from Adam to the last man on earth.

Is there then no salvation for sinners? Not here in the law, not here in this text; for this whole extract contains no Gospel, it is all law from beginning to end, and it condemns us all. This is the point which I to-day desired to impress on your minds. Beware of looking for salvation in passages like this which treat only of the law. Beware of applying the text in such a way as to say: Now I must go to work, and I must work out for myself a better righteousness than the Pharisees had. I tell you you will not get any farther than Nicodemus did, and

him the Lord condemns with all his works of righteousness and tells him he could not even see the kingdom of heaven unless he be born again. Our work in the law is all labor lost, if it is done to obtain righteousness before God.

But thanks be to God, that the Bible contains other passages which read very differently, passages which tell us that there is a fulfillment of the law for us sinners, a perfect fulfillment in which not one jot or tittle is lacking; for thus St. Paul writes: "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us." Rom. 8, 3. When we could not keep the law the Son of God appeared in our flesh and kept it for us, and that is just as good as though we had done it ourselves, because He did it in our place. His fulfillment of the law is imputed unto us if we claim it for ourselves as Paul did. After speaking of his blamelessness in the law when he was yet a Pharisee, he goes on to say: "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Phil. 3, 7. Once Paul was proud of his walking in the law, but when he came to the knowledge of Christ he cast aside the righteousness of his own works as worthless before God, and he clung to that righteousness which the Son of God had earned for him. While we gird our loins to adorn the Gospel of God by running the way of His commandments we must never presume to bring the righteousness of our own works before God. The righteousness of our works is a temporal righteousness and is of value only in this world, but the righteousness which the Eternal One has prepared in Jesus Christ is an everlasting righteousness valid in eternity.

This righteousness is offered to us freely in the Gospel. Here is our chance for heaven. In the law there is no chance for any one, but in Jesus Christ there is a chance for every one. Let not that chance slip. Neglect not this great salvation.

“The whole world lieth in wickedness,” 1 John, 5, 19, and the curse of the law is impending over it, alone in Jesus Christ is there a shelter against the thunderbolts of divine justice. Let us seek this shelter that we may escape from the wrath to come. Let us lay hold on the merits of Christ to wrap our souls in them, to bring them before the Father on the day of judgment and to say: ‘I am a sinner and have no righteousness of my own, but here are the merits of Thy dear Son of whom Thou hast said that He is “made unto us righteousness.”’ Knowing that this is the righteousness which God will seek when all nations will be gathered before Him we should daily pray:

O Christ, who diedst and yet dost live,
To me impart Thy merit ;
My pardon seal, my sins forgive,
And cleanse me by Thy Spirit.
Beneath Thy cross I view the day
When heaven and earth shall pass away,
And thus prepare to meet Thee. **AMEN.**

VII. SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

TEXT: In those days the multitude being very great, and having nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples unto him, and saith unto them, I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat : and if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way : for divers of them came from far. And his disciples answered him, From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness? And he asked them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven. And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground : and he took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to his disciples to set before them ; and they did set them before the people. And they had a few small fishes : and he blessed, and commanded to set them also before them. So they did eat, and were filled : and they took up of the broken meat that was left, seven baskets. And they that had eaten were about four thousand : and he sent them away.—Mark 8, 1-9.

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart ; and lean not unto thine own understanding,” so Solomon exhorts in the third chapter of his Proverbs. Solomon well knew, when man departs with his heart from the Lord, his own understanding is one of the first things in which he will put his trust. By the corruption which is in him fallen man is naturally inclined rather to trust to his own ingenuity and skill than in the invisible God. In all ages the genius of man has been accorded more true and genuine worship than the God of heaven, and the wise of this world have at all times found more faith with men than the Word of God. In the times preceding the reformation, the writings of the ancient heathen philosophers had obtained such authority in all Christendom that even theologians would rather contradict the Scriptures than gainsay the dictum of Plato or Aristotle.

But probably in no other age of the world has the deification of human reason been so great and so widespread as it is now. Progress has been great in the past century, and the universal

cry is: Great is the genius of man. When the geologist digs a stone out of the earth and declares that it required so many thousands or millions of years for it to form, hundreds of credulous wiseacres are ready to exclaim: Overthrown is what Moses wrote. In our fast-living age men do not stop to consider that the chemist can analyze the substance of which that rock is composed, but as to its age he can only guess. Men will admire a skillfully constructed machine and they will praise its inventor, but where are those who give glory to God for giving man understanding?

Reason is verily a wonderful gift of God, and it is given to man for use. For this very purpose God endowed man with reason and separated him from the brute creation by a chasm which cannot be bridged that he should have dominion over the earth. It is the will of God that man should apply himself to search out the powers of nature and to make them subservient unto him. The farmer does right to analyze his soil so as to be able to till it in the most rational manner. The farmer who will not employ the most improved methods of agriculture will be left behind, and he has no reason to complain. But to put reason in the place of God is idolatry. Putting the trust of the heart in the understanding of the head is an abuse of reason, and is itself an unreasonable act. Our trust is to be in the living God and not in our understanding. We may admire the achievements of human reason, and this very admiration should lead us to glorify Him who made man so noble a creature with such vast abilities of mind.

Because leaning to their own understanding is so universal with the children of this enlightened age, it is not at all surprising that the great mass of so-called Christians have forgotten or have cast overboard the old truth that "the Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up." 1 Sam. 2, 7. The prevailing opinion is, that in our modern constitution of society and in the race of competition every one must be the builder of his own fortune, and God has nothing to do with it. From this practical denial of God's providence in the affairs of every-day life two great evils result.

The greatest of these evils is that the running after riches increases from year to year. Men are no more content, as our forefathers so largely were, to make an honorable living in moderate circumstances, they aim to amass riches in the quickest and surest way possible. Why is it that insanity and nervous diseases of every description are so dreadfully on the increase? Is not this a chief reason, because men rack their brains and overtax their energies in the service of mammon?

The other great evil resulting from the leaning to one's own understanding is the apathy of despair into which men fall when their staff fails them. What careful and intelligent observer could fail to notice the crestfallen appearance of the public in the periodically recurring crises in business? Then suicides are reported by the score. What is the reason? When those who lean to their own understanding can see no way out they fall into despair and they at once begin to ask: "What shall we eat? what shall we drink? wherewithal shall we be clothed?" Yes, leaning to one's own understanding must be registered as one of the greatest evils of these latter days. It is in itself idolatry, and is the mother of untold sin and misery.

O! let us seek a better staff to lean on than our own understanding, a staff which will not break when the money-market breaks. Hence let me speak on:

THE FEEDING OF THE FOUR THOUSAND A STRONG EXHORTATION UNTO A CHEERFUL TRUST IN THE PROVISION OF
God, showing

- I. That the Lord is able and willing to provide; and
- II. That He can do great things by small means.

I.

This Gospel is so well known that I will not tarry to give a description of the miracle narrated in it. That multitude had been there for three days. A few provisions which some may perhaps have taken with them were all consumed and now the wolf was at the door. The Lord saw this and He said to the disciples: "*I have compassion on the multitude, because they*

have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat: and if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way." The Lord wanted to hear what counsel the disciples had to offer, but they said: "*From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?*" They ought to have remembered the many miracles which they had witnessed, and they ought to have said: 'Lord, Thou canst provide,' but they thought only of the present dilemma and they could see no way out. But that multitude was fed and there was a surplus left over.

God can and does provide for man. The first proof of His loving providence towards man was given at the creation. In six days he made heaven and earth and all that in them is for the benefit of man. He placed sun, moon and stars in the firmament to give light. He separated land and water and covered the dry land with verdure, useful vegetables, nutritious grain and trees bearing delicious fruits. He populated the waters with fish and the air with fowl. He made beasts to inhabit the forests and He covered the hills with cattle. When God on the evening of the sixth day took a survey of His works He found this earth a store-house full of good things. And now, when all was ready, God made man and placed him in the midst of the earth surrounded by plenty, a thousand creatures ready to serve him.

At this our infidelic Evolutionists of course wag their heads and say: 'What, feed thousands with a basket of bread and a few minnows! Build the world in six days!' They declare they could not believe such things. And what do *they* believe? Why they believe about in this way: Once at a time there was a cloud of vapor.—Don't know where it came from.—This cloud of vapor condensed and became a ball of fire.—Can't tell just how.—This ball of fire began to revolve.—Don't know what started it.—Instead of getting hotter by its revolutions this ball of fire began to cool off.—At furnaces you can observe the forming of cinder.—On this crust of cinder grass began to grow.—Don't know where the seed came from or how it managed to take root.—Then one sunny day the rays of that

great luminary, which happened to be in the firmament, happened to fall into a bog, and some of the slime became a live animal, which at first had neither head nor bones, but it began to *evolve* itself from one thing into another until it became man. Such is the creed of our Evolutionists and infidels, and the most deplorable about it is that they think themselves wise in this credulous folly. Pity for them.

Our creed is that an almighty and all-wise God, who exists in Himself and of Himself, planned this earth, and when He went to work on it He did not find it a difficult task to complete it in a very short span of time. Then He made man in His image after His likeness, a Godlike creature, giving him an intelligent soul that he might know and enjoy the goodness of his Maker. And what God made He preserves unto this day. He still provides for man. In this Valley you can scarcely find a square foot of ground which does not contain some fertility to produce food for man. And is it not a wicked thing that our hearts so little trust the goodness of our God

Who feedeth us from year to year
And constant doth abide ?

Neither is God limited to a fertile region, He can provide in a wilderness if He is so minded. When once the children of Israel craved meat in the desert God said unto Moses He would give them meat for a whole month. Then Moses said: "The people among whom I am, are six hundred thousand footmen; and thou hast said, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month. Shall the flocks and herds be slain for them, to suffice them? or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to suffice them?" Num. 11, 21. But God replied: "Is the Lord's hand waxed short? thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee, or not." Presently the wind brought quails from the sea and spread them around the camp two cubits high. In a waste place near the sea of Galilee the Lord so multiplied seven loaves as to satisfy four thousand men, women and children not counted. "Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in

the seas, and all deep places," Ps. 135, 6, and we should do Him the honor to believe that He can give us daily bread.

Yes, but is He willing to do it? We do not easily doubt His ability, but His willingness. Might He not again send a famine as in the days of Joseph? Oh, how quick are we to fear that He will perhaps not provide! We just lately had a very short dry time, and we began to worry about the later crops. We had harvested wheat enough to keep this entire community for a year or more, and why worry when there are stacks of grain in the field, when the poultry yard is supplied and a herd of kine is grazing in the meadow? Why worry when surrounded with plenty? A man does well if he frequently goes down into his own heart and begins to analyze the sources from which his thoughts flow, and if we so do we often find that deep down in the background of the heart there is a disregard of the first commandment: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." Of late years the nations of Europe have been sending their fleets across the seas to grab land in every corner of the globe and we call them "landgrabbers." Are we not of European stock, and is not the same inclination in us? Does not every one of us like to grab more and more? And when it does once just begin to look as though our possessions should quit growing and might even diminish a little, we begin to worry and the old Adam is all out of humor. Therefore I say, it is good for a man to frequently look into his own heart and to examine its thoughts. Often have I caught myself needlessly worrying and had to be ashamed that my trust in God was so little. We ought to be like the people in our text. They let things lay at home and followed Jesus to the wilderness.

Well, was not that a reckless way, to go without providing provisions? I say no; for this Jesus preached them a doctrine which gave them hope of everlasting life, a doctrine which they never heard in the synagogues, although they went there every Sabbath, and the gracious words which dropped from His lips together with the miracles which He performed held them there until there was real danger that some must faint for hunger. And how did they fare?

"I have compassion on the multitude." No one had told Him, but Jesus knew their condition. The Lord knows our needs. Our God is not like the idols of the heathen which have eyes and see not, ears and hear not. "He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see?" Ps. 94, 9. Neither has our God withdrawn from the earth to go far away. "Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Do I not fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord?" Jer. 23, 23. He is on the mountain and in the valley; His eye is upon us when we lie down and when we rise up; He knows when we hunger and it is not hid from Him when we thirst. Well might Elijah mock the priests of Baal, saying: "Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked." 1 Kings 18, 27. Their god was a creation of their own fancy, but the Keeper of Israel slumbereth and sleepeth not. Are we in need? His eye sees it. Does the burden of poverty press hard upon us? His ear is open to our cries.

What of it, if the Lord does know our necessities and will not take it to heart? if from His throne on high He sees our misery and it moves Him not? We are but too ready to cry: "Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" Ps. 77, 9. "How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me?" sighs David. Ps. 13, 1.

Zion mourns in fear and anguish,
 Zion, city of our God:
 Ah! she saith, how sore I languish,
 Bowed beneath so hard a load;
 God hath sure forsook me quite,
 And forgot my evil plight.

"I have compassion on the multitude." They had not asked Him for food, moved by His own mercy He opened His lips to speak those gracious words. Of old He promised: "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking I will hear." Is. 65, 24. Before His distressed children cry unto

Him He has already considered their woes in His heart. Trust the Lord's mercy and be quiet.

Or do you fear, He might deal with you like a man who expresses sympathy with the distress of his poor neighbor, and moves not a finger to help him? The multitude in our text did not go home hungry. From words the Lord proceeded to acts and they were fed. He did not give bread to those people the first day, nor yet the second; He waited three long days; yet those people stayed with Him, and finally His own loving heart constrained Him to give them bread. Patience! Wait, and the Lord will help in His own time and way. He has promised it and He will do it.

II.

Yet this promise of God does not exempt a man from seeking the means of support for himself and his family. In our text it is distinctly stated that the Lord employed means to feed that multitude in the wilderness. God may make an exception, if He sees proper to do so. Moses and Elias were both supported for forty days without food, and we do not read that they suffered hunger, although for more than a month they partook of no nourishment. So Christ might have prevented that multitude from becoming hungry, nourishing them inwardly by His divine power. But He suffered them to become faint from lack of food, and then He asked the disciples: "*How many loaves have ye?*" He used the little which was on hand, and He blessed it and made it reach, and more than reach, for four thousand men. He took what was there and over this He gave thanks.

The means through which God has promised to give daily bread is labor, labor of some kind. The man who is not willing to engage in some useful employment has no promise, excepting the word: "If any will not work, neither should he eat." 2 Thess. 3, 10. A family may be rich to-day, but if the members of that family will do nothing, they will go to nothing, if not in the first, yet certainly in the third or fourth generation. On the other hand, an industrious man may be obliged to live

on a very small income, and yet the little which he has will steadily grow and increase. Both are established by the 37th Psalm, saying: "Such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off. They shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away." In a protracted lifetime we can often see this verified. Many a pious man with small means raises a family of hale and hearty children, and there is happiness in his house, while the fortune of many a rich man is wrecked and strangers get his possessions. The blessing of God makes the little to multiply, and His curse causes riches to dissolve like vapor in the sunshine.

Therefore we should learn not to despise small means. If we must labor hard with a small income we should be heartily thankful to God for what He gives us, considering that a dime with God's blessing is better than a dollar with a curse clinging to it. Certainly, the man who comes home whistling and eats a piece of bread scantily buttered with a hearty appetite is far better situated than a rich man who has a table loaded with dainties before him, but cannot eat because of a spoiled stomach. It is the blessing which rests on a thing that makes it a real good to its owner. You rich man, see that you despise no righteous man, because he is poor. If you do, you are loading yourself and all you possess with a curse, and sooner or later you will find out that God resisteth the proud. And you poor man, envy not your richer neighbor. Perhaps, if you were put in his shoes for one single day only, you would be heartily glad to return again to your former condition. "Better," says Solomon, "is little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure and trouble therewith. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith." Prov. 15, 16.

Because it is the blessing of God which gives their best value to earthly things, therefore the Christian will never consent to do any thing which must deprive him of that blessing. He will never employ sinful means to increase his goods. The adage says: Unjust goods bring not into the house, it will drive out the blessing. That saying is true, and what an amount of

unjust goods must you bring into your house before it could make up for the blessing lost. A dollar honestly got is better than an eagle won by fraud. Exact not usury from the poor, lest you be found among those who devour widows' houses. Never use your money in sinful speculations, nor yet in such which are of a dubious character, but rather be content with small gain of which you know that it is right; then it will stay with you and will do you good. And if you are poor, never resort to wicked ways to gain riches, but rather remember that "godliness with contentment is great gain." 1 Tim. 6, 6. It is an easy matter for the Lord to make the indigence of the pious reach where the riches of the wicked would not suffice. With a handful of meal and a cruse of oil that widow of Zarephath nourished the prophet Elijah, when the wealthy in Israel could not or would not do it. The hand of the Lord is not shortened, He can do great things by small means, and often He imparts but little of this world's goods to His most beloved children to draw them the more unto the love of spiritual things. Never will He forget to provide for you, provided you remain in the way of truth and right. The same Lord who satiated that multitude in the wilderness has said: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." John 6, 51. Let Him be your heart's treasure and you have the true riches, riches which will be a sweet comfort to you in the gloomiest of days and over which your soul will rejoice for ever. Lord Jesus, be Thou the food of my soul, and I have enough. AMEN.

VIII. SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

TEXT : Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.—Matt. 7, 15–23.

This Gospel forms the conclusion of the sermon on the mount, that powerful exposition of the law. In the 12th verse of this chapter the law is summed up in the words: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets." After giving this summary of His whole sermon the Lord subjoins a warning and, as it were, says: I, as a true prophet, have now taught you the true doctrine; abide in it, and "*beware of false prophets,*" who would teach you otherwise.

Between that summary of the law and this warning against false prophets, the Lord inserts solemn words which, considered in their connection, throw much light both on that which precedes and which follows. They are these: "Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Two ways to eternity. Each and every one on earth is walking in one of these ways; for a third there is not. The one is commodious, easy to find

and easy to travel; it is downhill: the other is hard to find and hard to travel; it is uphill. The one is traveled much, the other little.

The broad way is the way of the flesh, the way in which all the world walks. There is indeed, a something in every man which upbraids him for walking in that way, but this voice in the bosom is cried down by the flesh, saying: 'It is a pleasant way and delightful to walk in it.' It is a broad way in which the carnal heart has free room to do its pleasure. Walking in this way a man need not bridle his evil lusts and desires, he can freely foster and follow them. In this way there is also good prospect of obtaining riches, honors, pleasures; for with those walking in this way it is customary to use all manner of means to gain these things. In this way a person is not harassed by the devil; for he has built this way and loves to see men walk in it. On the broad way man lives as he chooses, in avarice or in extravagance, in drunkenness or in pride. "And many there be which go in thereat." No wonder. It is the broad way of the world. But, says the Lord, be ye not deceived, because many walk in this way. To walk therein is pleasant to the flesh, but the end is destruction. It is a gay way, but ends in the abyss. It is the way of which David says in his first Psalm: "The way of the ungodly shall perish." Of those walking in it St. Jude says: "Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain;" and Jeremiah calls it "the way to death."

The narrow way is the way of following after Christ. A strait gate leads to it, the name of which is repentance. To enter by this gate a man must put away pride, self-righteousness, and the love of sin and the world, or he cannot pass through. If a man has passed through the strait gate he finds the way narrow, hedged in on both sides by the commandments of God, and leaving no room to follow the inclinations of the flesh. The devil is the enemy of those on the narrow way and he makes it a point to throw all manner of obstructions in their way, and those on the broad way taunt them for walking in so narrow a path when there is a commodious way to walk in. "And few there be that find it." No wonder that few walk in this way,

and that even of these few some turn back again. But, says the Lord, be ye not offended, because the way is narrow and few walk in it; walk ye in this way; for the end is everlasting life.

Why does the Lord place this admonition immediately before His warning against false prophets? What connection is there between walking in the narrow way and beware of false prophets? From the Lord's connecting these two things, walking in the narrow way and beware of false prophets, we learn that it is something essentially necessary to avoid following any guide who would lead us out of the narrow way. Let us therefore to-day, after we have several times heard the verbal explanation of this text, consider in general:

THE DUTY TO AVOID THE BROAD AND TO WALK IN THE NARROW
WAY IN MATTERS OF DOCTRINE AND WORSHIP.

Let us examine

I. What this implies; and

II. Why it is so necessary.

I.

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." Prophets, in the sense in which the word is here used, are all those who teach, or pretend to teach, the Word and will of God. True prophets are those who teach the Word of God right, false prophets are those who corrupt the Word of God by introducing their own opinions or the traditions of men. Not only the false prophets themselves, but also their doctrine may have the "form of godliness," as the Lord here says that they *"come in sheep's clothing,"* yet the true inwardness of their doctrine is always destructive to the soul. Now this is the command of the Lord, to distinguish between true and false prophets, and to adhere to the true, but to avoid all false teachers.

But, as false prophets come in sheep's clothing, by what are we to distinguish the true prophet from the false? *"Ye shall know them by their fruits,"* says the Lord. The fruits of a prophet are his prophecies. By these it is known, whether he

is a true or a false prophet. A tree is known by its fruit, a bird by its song, a prophet by his prophecies, doctrines and teachings. "By thy words," said the Lord on another occasion, "thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." Matt. 12, 37. True of all men, this saying primarily applies to prophets. The touchstone by which the doctrines of all teachers must be tried is the Word of the apostles and prophets. By this Word we are to examine the preaching we hear. We should lay it down as our unalterable principle: 'What is in agreement with this Word we adopt, no matter who says it, and what is not in agreement with this Word we reject, even though the most learned and pious man on earth say it.' To do this each and every one is commanded; for to the whole multitude gathered around Him the Lord said: "*Beware of false prophets.*"

Do you say: 'I see that clearly enough; it is true, and my own conscience tells me that I should hold to the truth and not to error; but it is not so easily done; there are difficulties and obstacles in the way.' That is exactly what I meant to tell you: to beware of all false and to adhere solely to true prophets belongs to walking in the narrow way; it is not something sweet and pleasant to the flesh.

Which, in regard to doctrine and faith, is the narrow and which the broad way? The narrow way is, in all simplicity, or rather, if you will allow me the expression, in all foolishness to accept, to hold, to confess the written Word of God and to carry it out in practice. We walk in the narrow way, if we bind ourselves down to the Word; if we say: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them," Is. 8, 20, and we will not hear them. We walk in the narrow way, if we reserve unto ourselves no room, no liberty, no chance to bring in philosophy, or reason, or to explain the Word according to science, or preconceived ideas, or theories of men. We walk in the narrow way, if we in all things carry out in practice what the Word commands; if we say: 'So it is written and so I do, let the consequences be what they will; let people like it or dislike it.' We walk in the narrow way, if we say: 'The written Word is

supreme authority, from which there is no appeal; what the words express decides our faith and governs our practice;’ if we leave no back-door open to escape the Word, and if we seek no artful contrivances to explain it so as to “please men.”

So binding ourselves down to the Word we in truth walk in a narrow way, because in this way we are hedged in, and can believe and teach nothing which is not plainly expressed in the Word of Scripture. Is it the right way? Most assuredly it is; for when the Lord here warns us to beware of false prophets He even thereby commands us to adhere only to true prophets. Now if we adhere to the written Word we do adhere to true prophets, because the apostles and prophets were the instruments of the Holy Ghost, as Paul declares: “We speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth.” 1 Cor. 2, 13. The words of the Scripture are the words of the Holy Ghost, and they mean what they express; and it is walking in the narrow way to adopt them as they stand and to do what they command.

On the other hand, it is walking in the broad way to refuse to be bound by the Word of Scripture, to reserve liberty to believe whatever suits the taste, or to claim a right to construe the words of the Scriptures according to one’s own pleasure. The liberalistic ideas so widely prevalent in our days cause many to ask: ‘Why should I be bound down to that old book? why should I not be free to believe what I please?’ To be so minded is certainly the next stepping-stone to infidelity; for if a man thinks he has a right to believe what he pleases in matters of religion, then his carnal reason will very soon not want to believe anything except what his senses perceive. We must not blend together civil liberty of conscience and emancipation from the authority of the Divine Word. Our government grants liberty to every one to believe what he pleases and to worship God according to the dictates of his conscience, and this liberty the government justly guarantees to all its citizens; for the civil authorities were ordained to promote the temporal welfare of the citizens, and not to make provision for the salvation of souls; but we are here not speaking of civil liberty,

but of liberty before God. The Bible does not grant us liberty to believe what we please, it demands that we shall believe what it says; for thus the Lord commanded by Moses: "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it." Deut. 4, 2. Nowhere does the Bible say, a man should have liberty to believe what he pleases. That would indeed be a broad and convenient way.

Likewise, it belongs to walking in the broad way, if we do say that the Bible is the supreme rule of faith, but seek ways and means to twist its teachings to suit our notions, or to make them agree with the wisdom of the world and the speculations of philosophy falsely so called. This too belongs to walking in the broad way, if we do not want false doctrines rebuked publicly, or do not want the truth confessed so plainly in word and deed that errorists and the world would be offended. To go by expediency in matters of doctrine and faith, to construe the Word so as to please the carnal-minded and the wise of this world, is walking in the broad way.

If, in matters of doctrine and faith, many claim the liberty to *believe* what they please, the number of those will scarcely be less who claim for themselves the liberty to *live* as they please and to do what they please. The latter will naturally result from the former. The man who will not be hedged in by the teachings of the Bible is very apt to find the way of the commandments too narrow for him. Those are not few who are church members and perhaps frequent the house of worship, but they live like heathen. They practice cursing, lying, cheating; they walk in avarice, spite and envy; they delight in intemperance, fornication and lasciviousness; they want to miss none of the carnal joys of this world. They say within themselves: 'Let preachers preach; we will do as we like.' "*Ye shall know them by their fruits: Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles. Even so a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.*" The fruit shows the quality of the tree. They that walk after the flesh are evil trees planted in the broad way, and their having their name on the church roll will not save them from the place to which that way leads.

And what of that other class who have the name of being Christians, who bring not the fruits of the Spirit? What of those who say "*Lord, Lord,*" and do not the will of the Father which is in heaven? What of the trees that bear leaves and bloom and bring no fruit? "*Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.*" The tree that brings no fruit is no good. "A certain man," says the Lord, "had two sons; and he came to the second, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard. And he said, I go, sir: and went not." Matt. 21, 30. To say Lord, Lord, and yet not gird the loins to do the will of God is an easy, convenient, broad kind of religion, and many there be who walk in this way.

But the Lord here speaks of still another class of such who profess to be His servants, saying: "*Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?*" Among these are some who spake true prophecies, as Balaam, that avaricious and wicked fellow, who gave utterance to that beautiful prophecy of the Star out of Jacob; some who performed true miracles, as Judas, the thief and traitor; some who perform "lying wonders," very common in the time of popery. To them belong the "false Christs and false prophets" who have appeared in great numbers in these latter days, pretending to perform miracles. What are we to judge of these? In what way are they walking? The words of their mouth betray the sentiment of their heart. Because they have done such great works they count themselves worthy of a seat in paradise. They walk in the way of spiritual pride, self-conceit and carnal boastfulness. Those in the narrow way speak a very different language. They do not glory in their own works, they glory in the work of Jesus Christ. They do not say: We have worked righteousness, they say; 'Our Lord Jesus Christ has worked righteousness for us.' Their own works are very small in their own esteem, but great unto them is the work of Him who shed His blood to redeem them from sin. To be cleansed from their sins by the blood of Christ is to

those in the narrow way the one thing needful. They sing as they go:

And should I through Christ's merits prove
Yet e'er so faithful in my love,
That I could keep from wrong alway
And sin not to my dying day ;
Still would I when I Christ shall see,
Not think of zeal or piety,
But this : a sinner nears the throne
Whose plea for life is grace alone.

Surely, every one who brings his own works before God is walking in the broad way, being "vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind." Col. 2, 18.

II.

That it is far easier and pleasanter to the flesh to walk in the broad than in the narrow way, is evident. The man who is ready to bow to every Word of God, and who will confess and practice it, must soon experience the truth of the words which the Lord spake to the disciples: "Ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake." Matt. 24, 9. Both infidels and errorists are united in opposition to him who holds and confesses the Word of truth and right, and frequently this will cause him pecuniary losses, because those who hate the truth will, if possible, avoid having dealings with him. The confession of the truth and genuine godliness do not make a man popular with the world. To continue in the Word is surely walking in the narrow way.

Why be so scrupulous about keeping in the narrow way of God's Word and command, and avoiding the broad way of liberalism? Are there not also among those who entertain errors true children of God? It is true, a man may be in error in some or even in many points of doctrine without knowing it and yet be a true Christian, but woe unto us, if we knowingly and willingly sacrifice one jot of God's truth, or in any way sanction the perversion of any one Word of the Lord; for then would we be obliged to experience that the broad way indeed does lead down to destruction. In this respect doctrine and morals

compare. A man may sin from ignorance and yet remain a Christian. If a Christian does aught against the law of God without knowing that it is sin, he is indeed culpable before God; for ignorance brings guilt, because no man should be ignorant of what is the will of God; yet sinning unwittingly will not make a man an un-Christian, because it is done in ignorance. But if a man willingly does that which he knows to be sin and so consents to sin, he is condemned; and if a man adheres to or sanctions a doctrine which he knows to be false, he is equally condemned; for in both cases he acts against his own better knowledge. Likewise condemned is he who is willfully ignorant, who does not know the truth and does not want to know it, as well as the man who does not care, whether he has the truth or not. A man who does not care whether, in his actions, he does right or wrong is certainly not a Christian, otherwise sin and virtue could not be indifferent to him; neither can he be a Christian who does not care whether the doctrine which he hears and holds be true or false, otherwise the truth of God could not be an indifferent thing to him. It was one of the most artful devices of Satan in these latter evil days to bring up the idea, if a man were only sincere in his convictions, it would make no difference what he believed, and he need not be so scrupulous about orthodoxy. That is one of the great falsehoods of our times, and it is the mother of indifferentism and emancipation from the authority of the Word. With our text it surely compares strangely: "*Beware of false prophets.*" A clear and distinct command of the Lord. Dare we set it aside? dare we say, it would make no difference whether the prophecy which we hear, to which we hold, be true or false? If we set aside this command of the Lord and will not beware of false prophets and will not search in the Scripture whether the teachings which we hear are divine truth, then we are taking away from the Word of the Lord, "and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." Rev. 22, 19. Those who refuse to do a command of the Lord, or who

set it aside as unnecessary and indifferent, are not minded like the children of God; for these say: "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth." 1 Sam. 3, 10. Surely, all those who teach men so are false prophets, and will receive the reward of false prophets; for they are speaking against the Lord.

Akin to this saying, is that idea so commonly expressed: It would make no difference what a man believed, if he would only live right. Many there are who accept this notion as a wise and true saying, but it is one of those sayings which, like counterfeit money, will pass only until they are examined right. Is it a wise and true saying: It will make no difference what ideas a man has about farming, if he will only farm right? You will say: That is nonsense. If a man has wrong ideas about farming he will farm wrong. The man who is convinced that he can raise a good crop of corn by planting in the fall will plow and plant, and labor and seed will be lost. First a man must be taught farming, and he must be taught it right, then he can farm right. First a man must believe right, then he can live right. Life and walk flow from a man's creed and faith. The man who believes the Mormon doctrine will live like a Mormon. The man who believes the Koran will exult in sabering Christians. Right faith will beget right life, wrong faith wrong life. Therefore it is so highly necessary to walk in the narrow way, and not to dread the labor and trouble of searching the Scriptures to learn from them what to believe and how to live in order to be saved.

This necessity the Lord urges upon us when He says of false prophets that "*they are ravening wolves.*" False prophets are "*ravening wolves,*" because they destroy the souls like wolves destroy the sheep. We have therefore great reason to do what the Lord says of His sheep: "A stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers." John 10, 5. In all things concerning the salvation of the soul we must incline our ears to none other than to Jesus alone; for He alone is that good Shepherd who saves His sheep from the wolf. If we hear a voice which would lead us away from the truth as it is in Jesus, we must turn away our ears

from hearing that voice. False doctrine is not something harmless; when and in as far as a preacher preaches false doctrine he is a false prophet, and his teachings are an evil fruit, deadly to the soul. Errors and false teachings do not save, they destroy, because they lead men a wrong way, and you all know that traveling a wrong way will never bring to the proper point. Every one who would arrive at the desired place of destination must keep on the straight road of truth, and must avoid the byways of error.

I am well aware that this is speaking hard against the spirit of the age; for the spirit of the times is that the view should be broad, creeds abolished and the borders widened, so that all manner of doctrines might be tolerated in the church. Modern latitudinarianism and liberalism in matters of doctrine is truly a broad way, and those who refuse to walk in that way, who teach and practice in strict accordance with the inspired Word, are offensive to the present generation, are looked upon as stumbling blocks and decried as enemies of peace. But what! though men pronounce us narrow-minded and stiff-necked! though they talk of us as of bigots far behind the times! We know that the times change. What men to-day laud to the skies as great wisdom, they to-morrow ridicule as outrageous folly. But the Bible does not change. It outlives the theories and systems of men; for the world with its wisdom passeth away, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever. Let us walk in the narrow way of truth, and we have the great promise of the Lord: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8, 31. AMEN.

IX. SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

TEXT : And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward ; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee ? give an account of thy stewardship ; for thou mayest be no longer steward. Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do ? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship : I cannot dig ; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord ? And he said, A hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou ? And he said, A hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write four-score. And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely : for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness ; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. Luke 16, 1-9.

“ The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof ; the world, and they that dwell therein,” says David. Ps. 24, 1. The earth and all that therein is belongs to God who created it and who upholds it, but since sin entered into the world man is prone to claim the earth for himself. Forgetting that the earth belongs to Him who made it, men will regard themselves sovereign lords of what they possess in worldly goods. They will say : ‘ Can I not do what I will with mine own ? whether I hoard it up, or squander it, or whatever I choose to do with it is only my own affair.’ In as far as other men are concerned there is some truth in this saying. So long as a man keeps within the bounds of the civil laws and does not use his possessions in unlawful ways he has *power* to do what he will with his own, and no man can call him to account. But there is One who will call him to

account, God, the true owner of the earth; for when God gave to man dominion over the earth He did not relinquish His title to it, He rather made man His steward. Every one, though he possess ever so little of this world's goods, is a steward of God. All that I have, from the greatest to the least, belongs to God. In civil law it is of course my property, but before God I am nothing more than steward over it.

Now if we are stewards of God, He will surely once call upon us to give an account of our stewardship. Though in civil law we be freeholders whom no man can call to account, yet to God we will be obliged to render a statement of the use which we made of His gifts. The spendthrift will be obliged to confess: 'I squandered Thy gifts;' the miser: 'I set my heart's love on them.' As man must give an account of every idle word which his tongue speaks, so he must also give account of the use which he makes of his worldly possessions. Hence it is a question of great importance, how to exercise our stewardship, so that our account may turn out well? The Lord answers in the parable before us:

“MAKE TO YOURSELVES FRIENDS OF THE MAM-
MON OF UNRIGHTEOUSNESS.”

In explanation let me propose three questions:

- I. To whom is this command given?
- II. What must we do in order to make to ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness? and
- III. Why should we be so eager to do this commandment?

I.

The Lord here represents to us a rich man who had a steward. This steward was a wise and cunning, but wicked man who abused his office by wasting his master's goods. When this was reported to his master, he called him to account and deposed him from his office. Now this steward was in embarrassment; for he says: “*What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.*” To work he was too lazy, to beg he was too proud. But his craft-

iness came to his aid and helped him out of his dilemma. As steward he had a knowledge of his master's financial affairs, and when he saw that the office would be taken from him he called his master's debtors and changed their bonds, telling them to write a much smaller amount. He cunningly calculated, if his master would depose him from his office, he would have placed these men under so great obligations that they would keep him the rest of his days, and he would neither need to work nor to beg for a living. By this operation he slyly got his lord's debtors into the same boat with himself so that he had a hold on them, and if thereafter they would not show themselves willing to do something for him he had it in his power to accuse them of forgery and to get them into prison. This unjust steward was certainly a shrewd fellow.

Now it is said in our text: "*And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely.*" Is there anything commendable in this steward? He defrauds his master most shamefully; he cheats him out of fifty measures of oil, twenty measures of wheat, and likely with other debtors out of still more. How can the Lord commend him? O, the Lord does not commend him for his cheating; He does not say that it was right what this steward did, He pronounces him an unjust steward, but He commends him for his cunning. If a robber gains entrance into a house in an artful manner he is and is called a robber, yet people will say that he is a sharp fellow and went to work skillfully. So the Lord does here not commend the fraudulency of this steward, but his cunning that he so artfully used his office to acquire friends who would stand by him in his time of need. This cunning foresight of the unjust steward is what the Lord commends as an example saying: "*And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.*"

To whom is the Lord here speaking? Does He perhaps mean those who have gathered riches by wicked means? Are these with their ill-gotten riches to do much good to the honor of God? This cannot be the Lord's meaning; for by the prophet

Isaiah God says: "I the Lord love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt-offering." Is. 61, 8. From goods gained by wickedness no acceptable offering can be brought to God, the law rather requires that whoever has defrauded his neighbor in anything shall restore it again. The founding of universities and building of orphanages cannot make amends for fraudulent speculation and oppression of the poor. This is not the reason why Christ calls mammon "*the mammon of unrighteousness*," because it was obtained by unrighteousness. Neither does the Lord mean to say that there is unrighteousness in the mammon itself—no unrighteousness cleaves to a piece of money—, He calls it the mammon of unrighteousness, because much unrighteousness is practiced for it and by it. The Lord does not mean mammon which is obtained by theft and fraud, but mammon in general; particularly that which is possessed rightfully, which is gained fairly by inheritance or honest labor.

Fully to understand to whom Christ gives this command we must consider what the word mammon means. Mammon is wealth, surplus goods. What we necessarily need for our sustenance is not mammon, but whatever is more is mammon. Mammon is spare goods. Hearing this most people say within themselves, well then this command did not concern them; for they had no spare goods. Therefore we must further ask: Who has mammon and who not? Are the possessors of mammon only the very rich who are worth hundreds of thousands? There are two ways to calculate: as the world calculates and as God calculates. As the world calculates there are few who possess mammon, as God calculates there are very many. As the world calculates there is rarely anything to spare. The one worth five thousand says: There is nothing to spare; that's very little; another worth ten thousand says: I wish it were ten times ten thousand. They that love money have never enough, they always want more, and according to the calculation of the world there would be very little mammon in the world.

How does God calculate mammon? Solomon says: "Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me." Prov. 30, 8. Paul admonishes: "Having food and

raiment, let us be therewith content." 1 Tim. 6, 8. John the Baptist preached: "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise." Luke 3, 11. So God's calculation differs widely from that of the world. That which we daily need for the nourishment and protection of our bodies is also according to God's calculation not mammon, but whatever is more, be it ever so little, is mammon. From our text it follows, that every one possesses mammon according to the Lord's calculation who has what he might give away without robbing himself of the necessary food and raiment. According to God's calculation therefore there are very few who have no mammon at all. Who amongst us could say that he has nothing at all which he might spare? Surely, every one of us must confess that he has more or less mammon. Now it is not a sin to have mammon, but because we all have mammon, therefore this word of the Lord concerns every one of us.

II.

What shall we do with our mammon? how use it? "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God," says St. Paul. God has made us stewards over that which we have, and if we do not use it unto His glory, we, like the steward in our text, will be accused before God. Satan, whom the Church triumphant calls "the accuser of our brethren, which accuseth them before our God day and night," Rev. 12, 10, has an eye to our stewardship of our worldly possessions, and if he sees that we do not use them right he is not tardy in reporting it to our Master. Therefore we must so exercise our stewardship that this wily accuser can find no charge against us. This certainly requires great wisdom and prudence, and therefore the Lord here holds up to us for an example so wise and cunning a man of the world as this unjust steward. This ungodly fellow uses his master's goods for his own advantage. First, however, he took counsel with himself in what way he might gain most, and he came to the conclusion, using his master's goods to make friends to himself would be safest; for he calculated, those whom he helped in their time of need would thereafter help him when

his time of need would come. It was a villainous thing which he did, but he calculated shrewdly.

What this steward did is the way of the world. Compare his action with the practices of our days and you will find it essentially the very same thing. Do not our candidates for political offices frequently and liberally use their mammon to gain the friendship of their fellow citizens? Do not rich criminals make free use of bank notes to gain the friendship of their judges? When neighbor desires the friendship of neighbor he seeks it by the making of presents and the showing of favors. The children of the world use their mammon to gain friends, and this is so powerful an agency in the world that almost all friendship may be taxed by it. The adage, that money rules the world is true also in regard to friendship. The man possessing money need not be in lack of friends.

Hence the Lord here clearly means to say: As the children of the world wisely use their mammon to make to themselves friends, so ye Christians should use your mammon to make to yourselves friends. The children of the world use their mammon to gain friends for time, but we Christians are to use our mammon to gain friends who will stand by us, not only in the needs of this life—that would be a matter of minor consideration—, but also in eternity. This is the wisdom which the Lord here commends to us, to use our mammon, this vain and perishable thing, to gain friends whose friendship lasts to eternity. The Lord, as it were, exclaims: ‘Behold the children of the world! how artfully they seek their advantage by applying their mammon to gain the friendship of men; imitate their example, but be ye wiser than they and apply your mammon to gain friends for eternity.’ O a great, great thing! Who would not be ready to give a goodly sum of money to obtain a trusty friend for a period of ten years only? and how much more for eternity?

What must we do to gain such friends with our mammon? The worldling secures friends by giving; he gives some of his mammon and in return obtains a friend. Even so must we gain friends for eternity with our mammon by giving, by dis-

tributing it. If we would have friends to stand by us in eternity we must serve them upon earth with our mammon. Here the Lord assures us that, with our mammon, we may make to ourselves friends who will receive us into everlasting habitations, and who would not gladly give of his mammon to have a friend who will speak a single word for him in that awful day when heaven and earth shall pass away.

Who are those whom we may gain for eternal friends, who, when we fail, that is, when we are called away from our stewardship, will receive us into everlasting habitations? They cannot be the dead saints; for these are dead and gone and we cannot serve them any more with our mammon; they must be such whom we help out of distress by giving them of our mammon, and these we need not seek long: they are mendicants, widows, orphans, poor students, blind heathen, and the like. We are to build the kingdom of God with our mammon. We are to use our mammon to gain the friendship of the needy, the spiritually and bodily poor.

But of what benefit will these friends be to us? Even if we do, by giving of our mammon, gain the friendship of a few beggars, or help to support a poor student of theology, or aid in sending a missionary to convert a few heathen, what advantage will it bring us? Much every way; for the Lord says to those on His right hand: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Matt. 25, 40. Even a cup of cold water shall not remain unrewarded. The Lord will forget no act of charity done for His sake. And those themselves also whose friendship we gain by a benevolent use of our mammon will not leave our benefaction unrewarded. If we give alms to a godly beggar he will say: O Lord, let Thy blessing rest upon this house. By giving alms we gain friends who pray for us, and that is verily worth much. The flesh of course objects to this and says: 'The beggars are no Christians; they will sooner curse their benefactors than pray for them.' I admit that most beggars are no Christians, but if amongst a hundred poor to whom you give an alms there is a single God-fearing one the prayer of that righteous one will avail much for

you before God. Or do you suppose that God will not hear the prayer of widows and orphans? Moreover, if Christians support theological institutions they and their children will in return be instructed in the Word of life, of which David says: "The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver." Ps. 119, 72.

But the noblest thanks our friends whom we gain by dividing our mammon will return on the day of judgment. They can, of course, not help us into heaven, whereof Luther says: "I would not give a penny for St. Peter's merits that he should help me; he cannot help himself; for what he has he has of God through faith in Christ. Now if he cannot help himself, how should he do any thing for me." Eternal life is the free gift of God, obtained alone through faith in Christ, and neither our own nor the works of others can contribute one particle to our salvation; yet the righteous to whom we communicate on earth for Christ's sake will be witnesses of our faith. Those who experienced the helping love of Christians on earth will bear witness of what was done unto them. The one will say: I was stricken with poverty and might have starved to death but for the help of this kind woman or that merciful man. Another will testify: I could not have studied divinity to labor in the service of the Church, if those liberal Christians had not supported me. Another will step forth, saying: O Lord Jesus! I was a blind heathen and would not be here in Thy presence, if not pious Christians had spent their goods to send a missionary to me who instructed me in the way of eternal life. Then the King will say unto those who have such evidence of their faith: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;" for what ye have done unto these, ye have done unto me. Matt. 25, 34. These are the friends, and this is the way, how they receive their benefactors into everlasting habitations, by giving testimony that they were faithful followers of the Lord. If any would have many witnesses of his faith in heaven let him make to himself many friends on earth of the mammon of unrighteousness.

And let no one say: I can not make to myself many friends, because I do not possess much mammon. Be thou faithful in that which God has given unto thee, and know that the mite of the widow is often more before God, than the great capital which a millionaire invests in grand institutions. God counts and weighs and rewards otherwise than men. "Every one," says the Lord, "that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake shall receive an hundred-fold, and shall inherit everlasting life." Matt. 19, 29.

Does any one desire to invest his mammon in a profitable way? Here is the way: invest your mammon in feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, instructing the ignorant, in up-building and spreading abroad the kingdom of God; do this in the right spirit, not for merit's sake, but from gratitude towards your Lord Jesus Christ who has redeemed your soul from everlasting starvation, and I will wager you, in this speculation your mammon will bring hundred percentage of everlasting interest.

III.

But here the Lord inserts a complaint which, alas! is but too true: "*The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.*" The children of light are those who are enlightened by the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of light, that they see the salvation of God in Christ Jesus. Of these the Lord complains that they are not so wise in their generation, that is, in spiritual things, as the children of the world are in their generation, that is, in worldly things. How wisely did this unjust steward seize on his opportunity to secure future advantage! How cunning and eager is the world in seeking after mammon! Is it not continually inventing new methods and new tricks to make money? Behold, ye children of light who seek heavenly treasures, if ye would act but half as wisely in your calling as the world does in its pursuits, what a treasure of good you might gather.

That our hands may be open and our pursestrings loose we should ever bear in mind that we will certainly be called on to

give account to our Lord. When this steward went out from his lord he did not strive to rid his mind of the unpleasant thought of losing his stewardship, he at once set about to make wise preparation against that eventuality. "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." 2 Cor. 5, 10. The day of our departure out of this world is coming and then the judgment will follow. Is it acting wisely, if we strive not to think of the account to be rendered, and live in this world as though we were lords and not stewards? If a merchant knows that a day of settlement with his creditors is appointed, will he forget that fact or try not to think about it? Every wise merchant will make it his study so to arrange his business as to be ready to meet the demands of his creditors promptly. Much rather should we make it our study to be ready to meet our day of settlement, that great day when the Lord will appear in the clouds of heaven. And we should show like eagerness as do the pleasure and treasure seekers of this world. Is there a dance? It creates a flutter for miles around. Is there a town boomed? The lovers of lucre from afar and near are quickly on hand. And the Christian? O, he is sleepy and can see no chance to do good when he is surrounded by opportunities and might have his hands full.

Why is it that we Christians are not so wise in our generation, as worldlings are in theirs? It is owing to the smallness of our faith. Carnal reason is always standing in the way, and it whispers: What you have is certain, but if you give it away who knows if the reward is certain. The certainty of *getting it back* is so hard for us to believe. Trust not to carnal reason. It is simply not true that the mammon we have is certain to us. Why there is nothing more uncertain; to-day we have it, to-morrow it may be taken from us, or we from it. But if we use it in the way the Lord here describes there is nothing more certain, than that the promised interest will come to us. O that we were truly wise! Our moneys, lands, capitals will not come in the day of judgment to bear witness of our faith,

but if we make righteous ones our friends by helping them with our mammon, they will be there. Early should young Christians accustom themselves to make deposits in the Lord's bank. There is a time when mammon should be kept very close, even though the world call you stingy. It is the time when you are tempted to invest in sinful things. But when Christ knocks at the door then let mammon walk out freely. Practice this from youth up and it will become a habit with you, and you will be able to give freely, and you will not be like so many professing Christians who think wonder how much they are robbing themselves if they give a dime for the orphans, or a dollar for missions. Jesus gave Himself for us; so let us be ready to give of our mammon for His sake. AMEN.

X. SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

TEXT : And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace ! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee ; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another ; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation. And he went into the temple, and began to cast them out that sold therein, and them that bought, saying unto them, It is written, My house is the house of prayer ; but ye have made it a den of thieves. And he taught daily in the temple. But the chief priests, and the scribes, and the chief of the people sought to destroy him, and could not find what they might do ; for all the people were very attentive to hear him. — Luke 19, 41-48.

God is true and faithful both in His promises and in His threats. For both the history of the world furnishes ample proof. History is in fact a mirror of God's love and retributive justice in that it shows His mercifulness unto those who walk in His ways, and His anger against those who depart from His covenant. Particularly do we learn from history how wonderfully God governs the Church, His kingdom on earth, causing it to wander from place to place, from nation to nation. Numerous are the instances of cities and nations which had the Gospel and lost it again, and such that sat in darkness and the shadow of death were gathered into the fold of Christ. Nineveh repented in sackcloth and ashes when the prophet Jonah threatened it with destruction, and because it repented, it was spared at that time ; but Nineveh turned again to the paths of wickedness, and now travelers can scarcely distinguish the spot where that mighty city stood. Mount Sion was once adorned with the splendid temple of Solomon, the habitation of Jehovah ; the same mount is now defaced by a Turkish mosque. The countries of Northern Africa were once embellished with numerous churches, but thievish Saracens

now lurk among their ruins. Asia, once so highly favored, has almost entirely lost the Gospel; the nations of the West have obtained it.

Is it just that God takes away the Gospel from one nation and gives it to another? Is it right when He shuts the door of grace at one place and opens it wide at another? Moses sings of the Lord: "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he." Deut. 32, 4. God is not unjust, He is faithful and He has no pleasure in taking away the light of the Gospel; it is His will that it should shine to all the nations of the earth; for thus the Lord commissioned His apostles: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." Mark 16, 15.

If this is the will of God, why then do individual persons and whole nations lose the light of the Gospel after they had once received it? The Lord answers in our text: "*Because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.*" Ingratitude for the gift of the Gospel is the cause of such dire judgments. God takes away His pearls from those who will not appreciate them, who despise them and scornfully tread them under foot. God deals with men according to the word which He addressed to the Messiah by the prophet of old, saying: "The nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted." Is. 60, 12.

For us and for our nation there is even now a time of gracious visitation. The light of truth shines unto us and the Word of grace is spread broadcast over the land. Let us have an open ear for the Gospel of God that we may

KNOW AND IMPROVE THE TIME OF OUR VISITATION.

Let us

- I. Remember the tears of Christ, and
- II. Well consider the destruction of Jerusalem.

I.

"*And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it.*" Who was it that wept, and over what did He weep?

It was Jesus of Nazareth that wept, and the city of Jerusalem was the unhappy cause of His tears. From Capernaum He had traveled through the midst of Galilee and Samaria and on the road crossing the Mount of Olives He drew nigh to the great capital of Judea. On the top of the Mount of Olives a grand scene opened to His view: the city in all its greatness, Mount Zion in all its beauty, and the temple in all its splendor lay before Him. Jerusalem was one of the wealthiest and most splendid cities of the East, and well might a traveler enjoy the sight thereof; but Jesus when He beheld the city was moved unto tears. He was the Son of God, one with the Father, as He said to the disciples: "I and my Father are one." John 10, 30. Hence we must say: God stood on the Mount of Olives and wept.

What was the cause of His tears? Must it not have been something very sorrowful which caused the Son of God to weep? When a child weeps we little regard it, but when a strong man weeps we wonderingly inquire for the cause. When Scipio Africanus wept it was at the conflagration of Carthage; when Julius Cæsar wept he did so at the sight of his fallen adversary Pompey. Why did Jesus weep? Oh, had He not cause enough to weep when He well knew that in a few days He would there in Jerusalem be condemned to die a miserable and ignoble death? "*He beheld the city, and wept over it.*" He did not weep over Himself; the sufferings, anguish and scorn which He was to endure were not the cause of His tears; for He willingly gave His life for the life of the world, as He says: "I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself." John 10, 17. Even at the gates of the city He might have turned back and avoided death, but of His own free choice He came to Jerusalem there to suffer and to die. Jerusalem was the cause of His weeping, for it His tears flowed; for when He beheld the city, He wept over it.

That city was indeed a murderess of God's saints. In it Manasseh had instituted the worship of idols and reddened the streets thereof with innocent blood; in it unnatural parents had sacrificed their sons and daughters to Molech; in it many

prophets had found a violent death; in it the hypocritical Pharisees had established their seat. And yet Jerusalem was that favored city which God had selected before all others for His especial habitation. "The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob," so sang the sons of Korah. Ps. 87, 2. To Jerusalem God sent His prophets; Jerusalem He again and again defended against its mighty enemies; to Jerusalem He at last sent His own beloved Son, and He, when He beheld the city, His eyes were filled with tears. Where is the city on which God showered His love and mercy in so rich a measure as He did on Jerusalem? Surely, God did unto Jerusalem as He promised by the prophet, saying: "As birds flying, so will the Lord of hosts defend Jerusalem; defending also he will deliver it; and passing over he will preserve it." Is. 31, 5. But the same prophet had to complain: "How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers. Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water." Is. 1, 21. The Lord loved Jerusalem, He mourned over its wickedness. The prophet Zechariah had proclaimed: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation." Ch. 9, 9. He came, this promised King, but He came weeping. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem," He sighed, "thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not." Matt. 23, 37. Verily a strong testimony of His love. When Jesus wept at the sepulchre of His friend Lazarus the Jews said: "Behold how he loved him!" John 11, 36. Even so we must here exclaim: Behold how he loves Jerusalem! how nigh is it unto His heart! what great a desire has He for its salvation! what bitter tears of anguish does the impenitence of this beloved city cost Him! And Jerusalem? O, it did not weep with the Lord. Its inhabitants gave a new, the strongest proof of their wickedness. They repaid the Lord's tears of love and mercy with the clamorous cries: "Away with him; crucify him." John 19, 15.

In vain was the innocence of the Lord, in vain His meekness and mercy, in vain did His tears flow; Jerusalem knew not and would not know the time of its visitation.

Are we like unto the inhabitants of Jerusalem? In one respect I know that we are like unto them: in the love and mercy which we have received from the hand of the Lord as well as they. As God revealed Himself to the Jews, so He has also revealed Himself unto us, clearly showing us the way of salvation in His Word. As the Lord spake to Jerusalem: "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings," and sighed with tears in His eyes: "*If thou hadst known, even in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace!*" so He comes unto us even to-day in His Word, saying, as it were, with tears in His eyes: 'O remember, dear soul, the things which belong unto thy peace. Behold I have loved thee with so great a love that I laid down my life for thee. See my red hands, my wounded side, my disfigured countenance. I have become a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, without form and without comeliness. Love for thee has made me such. Do not cast me away, do not pass me by; let me enter into thy heart and dwell therein.' As the Lord sware unto Israel: "As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live," Ezek. 33, 11. So He likewise swears unto us: 'As I live, I have no pleasure in your death; but strong desire within me burns that ye turn unto me and live.' Verily He has no hate in His heart against us; He seeks us on all our ways; He stands at the door and knocks, pleading for admission. It causes Him bitter anguish if we refuse Him, and His heart overflows with joy if we hear His voice and bid Him welcome. Jesus weeps over Jerusalem, He weeps over us sinners, His compassion at our destruction moves Him to tears; for He is love. Such is our Savior. Beholding our impenitence His heart is moved within Him and tears start from His eyes. A hardened heart indeed which can look on coldly and suffer the tears of Christ to flow in vain. Drops of water will at last hollow out the hardest rock, and should not the tears of

Christ soften our hearts? If our friends weep because of a misfortune which has befallen us, their tears increase our love towards them, and should not the tears of Jesus Christ draw us unto Him and bind us to Him with the bonds of love? Do you believe that Christ loves you? Look at Him weeping over sinners, and let His tears persuade you to seek refuge and safety for your soul in His loving bosom.

But if you little regard the love of Christ, if you, like Jerusalem, despise His tears, if the love of God cannot persuade you to turn from wickedness, then: *Consider well the destruction of Jerusalem.*

II.

The Lord is truthful, as in His promises, so in His menaces. What He prophesied to Jerusalem for its impenitence has been fulfilled to the last letter. He says: "*The days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another: because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.*" The tears of Christ which Jerusalem despised brought forth a terrible harvest to that fated city. At the same time of the year in which Jesus wept over the city, at the festival of Easter, and at the same place where the tears of Christ flowed, on the Mount of Olives, the Romans forty years thereafter began to cast a trench about the city and to besiege it. On account of the festival, the city was overfilled with people, and hunger and pestilence soon began their harvest. When there was no more space in the city to bury the dead they were simply thrown over the city wall where they lay in great heaps, so that when the Roman general Titus once came near the wall and beheld the sickening sight, he, although a hardened warrior, in great horror lifted his hands to heaven and called the gods to witness that this was not his work. It was indeed not his fault; for again and again he offered peace and pardon to the Jews, if they would surrender the city, but they would not. Every day hun-

dreds of them died of starvation, yet they would not have peace; for they had despised the time of their visitation, and now they were stricken with blindness. When the city was won, it was leveled to the ground. Several towers of the outside wall remained standing, but in the city itself not a stone remained unturned; for because of a report which had been spread, the Roman soldiers dug up the very foundation walls of the houses, seeking hidden treasures. Titus had commanded to spare the temple, but it was set on fire by soldiers and totally destroyed. Over a million of the Jews had perished and the rest were sold as slaves. Unto this day that people wanders about among the nations of the earth, a living monument of the truthfulness of God's menaces. They yet hope for a worldly Messiah, notwithstanding the princely house of David has been lost. Manifestly the curse of God rests heavily on that people, and well may we ask, as Moses introduces the nations, saying: "Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto this land? What meaneth the heat of this great anger?" Deut. 29, 24. And Moses gives the answer: "Then men shall say, Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord God of their fathers, which he made with them when he brought them forth out of the land of Egypt."

The Jews turned the tears of love which Christ wept on Olivet unto themselves into tears of wrath. They did cry: "His blood be on us, and on our children," Matt. 27, 25, and it is a heavy burden to them even at this day. It has come upon them what Moses warningly foretold them, saying: "The Lord shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart; and thou shalt grope at noon-day, as the blind gropeth in darkness." Deut. 28, 29. The Jews live in the midst of Christian lands where shines the noon-day light of the Gospel, but they grope in the thick darkness of their Rabbinical traditions. The Lord showed greater mercy to Israel, than to any other people; their ingratitude was greater than that of other nations, and their punishment is greatest. The Lord our God is a just God.

Here the question might be raised: Did the Lord want the destruction of Israel? Our text answers: He so wanted its de-

struction that He wept over the impenitence of Jerusalem. But does not the Lord Himself seem to exculpate them when He says: "*If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.*" What fault could accrue to them for not seeing what was hid from their eyes? Just this was their sin that it was hid from their eyes; for the Lord did not hide it from them, He declared it unto them, but they shut their eyes against it, wherefore the Lord says of them: "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin." John 15, 22. But does not St. Paul write of the Jews: "The election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded, according as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, ears that they should not hear, unto this day"? Rom. 11, 7. So it is written and even so it is at this day. It is clear as the noon-day light that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah, yet the Jews see not and hear not, they grope in darkness, and from generation to generation they rear up their children to hate Jesus of Nazareth. Should then God have doomed them, both fathers and children, to blindness and everlasting darkness? Paul puts this same question, asking: "Have they stumbled that they should fall?" But he answers: "God forbid; but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy." Rom. 11, 11. Behold here expressed in few words both the mind of God and the history of the Jews. God did all to prevent their fall: He sent them the prophets, they killed them; He sent His Son, they crucified Him; He sent the apostles, they persecuted them, and because they so stubbornly and persistently put the Word from them, the apostles, remembering the Lord's command concerning those who would not receive their word, shook the dust from off their feet and turned to the Gentiles. And even now it is the Lord's will that the Jews, seeing the Gentiles sitting in the kingdom of God, should be provoked to jealousy that they too should press into it, but though this is the will of God, yet few are the Jews who inquire after Christ to seek salvation in Him.

The spirit of slumber is upon them; they are eating the fruit of their own doing, and all because they knew not the time of their visitation.

To us the Jews are to be a warning example. Therefore St. Paul writes: "Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee." Rom. 11, 19. God had selected the Jews for His special people; they were like unto a tree planted at a water-brook and grown with much labor and care, yet when they proved unthankful they were cast away. Surely, if God spared not the beloved city of Jerusalem, neither will He spare others, if they will no more appreciate His mercy, and began to put His gifts from them as a vile thing.

Awake, thou that sleepest, and open thine eyes that thou mayest recognize the time of thy salvation. Jesus weeps over the impenitent sinners at Jerusalem, and not over them only, but over those also who inhabit the Valley of Virginia. God caused you to be born in a Christian land, perhaps of Christian parents, in a region where you find a Bible in every house, and where church steeples point to the sky. Is not now the day of your visitation? *Now* you are called on to repent of sin; *now* you are urged to turn to the Lord; *now* He pleads for admission to your heart to dwell therein and to adorn it with His merits. Will you say Him nay? Will you bid Him go away? O

Admit Him, lest His anger burn,
And He, departing, ne'er return;
Admit Him, or the hour's at hand
You'll at His door rejected stand.

To-day repent, to-morrow might be the day of God's vengeance upon you. To Jerusalem the Lord said: "*If thou hadst known in this thy day.*" When the Lord spake these words it was yet Jerusalem's day, yet time for repentance; but when the apostles had turned to the Gentiles, when the few Christians who remained at Jerusalem had shaken the dust of that city

from off their feet and had fled to seek a place of safety beyond the waters of Jordan, then Jerusalem's day was over, and the Lord's day of wrath was upon it. Then it was a doomed city, those within it were given "over to a reprobate mind" and there was no more room for repentance. The closer the city was invested, the harder the Jews were pressed, the more raging and desperate did they become. Now, friend, *now* is your day; now while you are young, healthy and of a sound mind. If you are taken sick and your mind wanders, then your day is over. Improve your day while it is yours and forestall the Lord's day of vengeance. "To-day if you will hear his voice, harden not your heart." Heb. 3, 7. Behold the Jews! They would not know the day of their visitation, they rejected the Holy One of Israel and their day passed away. Now they have been sitting in night since nearly two thousand years. If you neglect to improve your day the night will come upon you, and it will remain night with you forever.

Seek the Lord while He may be found and call upon Him to cast out those evil passions ruling in your heart, as He drove out the traffickers in the temple, denouncing them for having "*made it a den of thieves.*" As those dove-venders and money-changers profaned the temple of the Lord, so the love of money, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life defile the heart. If these are trafficking in your heart cast them out. They are robbers who rob you of peace with God. They are thieves who steal your good conscience from you. Cast them out and let your heart be a temple of the Spirit of Christ, and the Spirit of Christ will bring in the Spirit of prayer, and the Spirit of prayer will introduce the Spirit of praise.

This Spirit of prayer and praise will cause you to love "*the house of prayer,*" and when you turn your feet to this house He will teach you to do what is said at the end of this text: "*All the people were very attentive to hear him.*" Improve your day to sit at the feet of Jesus attentively to hear His words, and you shall know the Lord and it will be said of your soul as of Mary: "She hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." Luke 10, 42. AMEN.

XI. SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

TEXT : And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others : Two men went up into the temple to pray : the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other : for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased ; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.—Luke 18, 9-14.

IN JESUS CHRIST WHO IS OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS, DEARLY BELOVED FRIENDS :—“ *I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other,*” says the Lord of the two men, the Pharisee and the publican, who went up into the temple to pray. The words do not mean that the Pharisee was also justified, although not so fully and completely as the publican ; for so it might appear to some from our English translation ; the meaning of the words is : the publican went away justified before God, but the Pharisee went away not justified ; he remained under wrath and condemnation.

Justification, the justifying of the sinner, is the central doctrine of all Scripture. Just this is the object for which the Scriptures were given, that we should learn from them how to be justified before God. Therefore the word justification is the sweetest and most comforting word in the whole Scripture, namely to him who has learned what justification is ; who has learned it, not like this Pharisee that he can gabber much about the doctrine of justification, but who has learned it like the publican in the school of the Holy Ghost. A hypocrite or heathen may commit to memory what the Scriptures teach about justification, but only he can truly and fully appreciate this word

who, through repentance and faith, has himself experienced it; who has experienced what the Lord preached, coming into Galilee and saying: "The kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the Gospel." Mark 1, 15.

If therefore we would have the key for the understanding of the whole Scripture we must understand this text rightly. Why was this Pharisee not justified? He was certainly a pious man who kept the law as far as any man can keep it, who thought to make up for his deficiency in keeping all the law by doing some things more than the law required; for he says: "*I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.*" He fasted more and he gave more tithes than the law required; for the law did not require a man to fast twice a week and to give tithes of everything.

This man walked into the temple like one who is conscious of his virtues and his integrity, and he did not lie when he stood and prayed: "*God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.*" This man certainly behaved and spoke as one having a good conscience and able honestly to say that he had walked in the commandments of the law. On the other hand the publican behaved and spoke as one having a bad conscience; for "*standing afar off, he would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.*" If the people who were present in the temple at that hour would have been called on to judge between the two they must certainly have said: The Pharisee is justified by his works, and the publican stands condemned by his own confession. But the Lord's judgment is just the reverse.

What was wrong with this Pharisee? O there was much wrong with him, as the words show with which the parable is introduced: "*And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.*" In the 14th Psalm it is written of the children of Adam: "They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one," but this Pharisee came into the temple of the Lord, trusting in himself

that he was righteous, and he began to recount to God how much good he did. By this action he directly contradicted the Word of God and treated it as a falsehood. This Pharisee despised that publican and all who were not as good as he thought himself, but in the 14th chapter of Proverbs it is written: "He that despiseth his neighbor sinneth." This Pharisee was proud of his piety and good works, and the Lord declared of him: "*Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased.*" He trusted in himself and his own works, and therefore he was not justified; for, say the Scriptures, "by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight." Rom. 3, 20. The Pharisee was not justified, because he sought righteousness before God at the wrong place, namely in himself, and by the wrong means, namely by his own works. We will let him pass for to-day.

Why was the publican justified? That is the main point in this text. Let us therefore consider:

THE JUSTIFICATION OF A POOR SINNER BEFORE GOD.

Justification being a legal term used in courts let me present to you:

- I. The court, or the persons coming into consideration;
- II. The procedure in the justification of a sinner; and
- III. The conclusion that justification is by grace and not by works.

I.

In a well constituted court there are at least four persons, or four kinds of persons necessary: a judge, whose duty it is to examine the witnesses and to pronounce sentence on the accused according to the laws of the land; 2nd, the accused, or culprit, who must appear before the judge to hear his sentence; 3rd, witnesses to testify either to the guilt or the innocence of the accused; 4th, a lawyer to plead the cause of the accused. In our courts the functions of the judge are divided, the jury exercising part of them, and for human courts this arrangement is very wise and very right, but here it does not come into con-

sideration. These four personages, judge, accused, witnesses and lawyer constitute a court.

So the spiritual court for the justification of a sinner is likewise constituted. This publican appears in the temple of God and prays: "*God be merciful to me a sinner.*" He acknowledges that God is his judge. In this court God is the judge. He institutes the examination of the accused, and He institutes a close and fair examination; for He says: "I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts." And He is a just judge; for in the same passage He continues: "And I will give unto every one of you according to your works." Rev. 2, 23. This judge takes into account the whole guilt of the accused, but does not burden him with any thing more than he is guilty of. The accused in this court is the sinner, yet not all sinners, not any and every sinner, but only those sinners who are like unto the publican in our text. The impenitent sinners will be judged on the last day, the day of judgment for the world, but into this court in which sinners are justified only penitent sinners come. The witnesses in this court are chiefly the law of God and the conscience of the accused, although in this court witnesses are actually not necessary, because the Judge is omniscient and knows all things, and particularly because the accused does not deny his guilt, as we see in this publican. The lawyer, or advocate in this court is Jesus Christ, true God and true man, the mediator between God and the sinner, and the redeemer of the world. He pleads the case of the penitent sinner and procures his liberation before God; for, says St. John, "we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." 1 John 2, 1. So this spiritual court is constituted: The judge is the triune God, the accused is the penitent sinner, the advocate is Jesus Christ.

II.

And now what is the procedure in this court? How, in what manner, on what grounds is a penitent sinner justified? In a civil court the accused is justified or acquitted if he is found

innocent. Only a highly unjust and tyrannical court could condemn one who has been proven innocent. But is it possible that in the court of heaven any one can be found innocent? Nay; for "the Scripture hath concluded all under sin." Gal. 3, 22. The Pharisee in our text did flatter himself he would be found innocent and just in the sight of God, but he was not justified. God is not deceived by empty pretenses. Before God all are guilty, and he that denies his guilt will find no favor with God, as Solomon says: "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper." Prov. 28, 13. That a man born of woman could be justified in the court of heaven because of innocence is out of the question.

A way how a guilty criminal in a civil court may escape deserved punishment is by pardon. Then the case stands thus: The accused is guilty, he confesses his guilt, the witnesses prove him guilty, the law condemns him, the court knows his guilt, but the judge says: The prisoner is guilty, but just let him go, and setting aside both crime and law, and exercising clemency for justice he liberates the prisoner. Some imagine God so immensely good that He would not inflict punishment, but would let the sinner go unpunished. But is this applicable in the court of heaven? Will God, can God say of the sinner: He is guilty and my law condemns him, but I will overlook his guilt; I will exercise clemency before justice and will not punish his sins? In the 50th Psalm God introduces this very argument and says: "Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother's son. These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes." All those who seek to persuade themselves that God will condone sin and will not punish it will find themselves sadly mistaken. In innumerable passages of Holy Writ God has threatened to punish sin and He cannot deny His Word. Moreover, God has fixed a law, and that law is unalterable and inexorable. What the law demands must be done, and whatever punishment it imposes must

be inflicted; for of it the Lord says: "Verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." Matt. 5, 18. God cannot exercise clemency in such a way as simply to let the sinner go free for no consideration whatever, because He cannot overlook sin nor set aside His law. God will not say, like a weak-minded civil judge might say: This man has stolen, but it matters not, just let him go. God does not violate law and justice in that way.

A worldly judge may be moved by various considerations to liberate a convicted criminal. A judge may say: The prisoner is guilty, but in other respects he is a good man, or he regrets his misdeed, appeals for mercy and promises to reform, and in consideration of these things the judge may set him free. Is this applicable in the court of heaven? No, surely not. Many do seek to soothe their conscience by saying within themselves, though in some things they were doing evil, yet in other respects they were doing good, and that would square them in the judgment of God. But the law says: "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." James 2, 10. Virtuousness in some things can never make up for viciousness in other things. And as to the regretting of sin, asking mercy without mediation and promising to reform, those are all considerations which can be of no value in the court of God. We have already heard that God cannot set aside His law and simply overlook sin. It is all in vain when men, as they do in lodges, call on God for mercy without a mediator; for as God is merciful so He is also just, and He cannot exercise mercy in violation of His justice. Though a man regret his sin, call on the absolute mercy of God and resolve to reform his life, it is all of no avail; for the justice of God stands opposed and unalterably says: The law must be executed, sin must be punished.

Seeing the justice of God is so unalterable and so inexorable that He will not and cannot overlook the very least trespass, but requires the last letter of the law to be executed, who then can be justified? What could it help us, and what could it

benefit this publican to cry: "*God be merciful to me a sinner,*" if the justice of God forever raises protest and demands that sin must be punished? If we were to answer this question from reason and common sense we must certainly say that no sinner can be justified before God. When people lull their conscience to sleep by persuading themselves, God would not be so exacting, He would overlook faults; when they say: "The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it," Ps. 94, 7, they only give testimony upon themselves that they do not consider earnestly. God is an unalterable God who does not change with the moon, and He has passed an unalterable law, and that law says, whosoever offends in a single point is guilty and must die. Now there is not a man on earth who has not broken this Divine law, and no breaker of the law can make amends by regretting his sin, asking mercy and promising to reform, when that law unalterably says: Whosoever has violated one jot or tittle must die? Therefore judging by reason and sound common sense we could only pronounce it a thing impossible for a sinner to be justified in the court of heaven.

Right here some one might raise an objection and say: This publican repented of his sins and simply and only prayed: "*God be merciful to me a sinner,*" and the Lord says of him that he went down to his house justified. Is it then not enough for justification simply to call on the mercy of God in general without mediation? So it might appear from our English translation, but literally rendered the publican's words are these: "*God be reconciled, propitiated to me a sinner.*" The publican did by no means appeal to the mercy of God in a general way, asking Him to have mercy because He is good and kind and loves all His creatures, which, as we have before proved, could have helped him nothing; he appealed for God's special grace promised and obtained through the atonement for sin. The publican was in the temple, standing before the mercy seat or throne of grace which represented the promised Redeemer who would come to make atonement for sin. To this grace in the promised Redeemer the publican appealed. His prayer, worded in Old Testament language, was this: God, I have

sinned, but let me have part in the atonement which Thou hast promised in the Messiah, the Savior from sin.

This reminds us that there is another person in the court, of whom, in describing the procedure, I have thus far been purposely silent. The trial stands thus: The judge is just, truly and really just. He does not make the guilt of the accused one whit greater or less than it actually is. The accused is guilty and freely confesses his guilt. But how are the two to be brought together? The judge cannot overlook or condone the guilt of the accused, for that would be a violation of law and justice; and the accused can do nothing to remove his guilt; for it is there. Here neither good will on the part of the judge, nor crying, lamentation, or begging for mercy on the part of the accused could avail any thing. The sentence of the judge could be none other than this: 'The accused is guilty and the law must have its course,' and so it must remain to all eternity.

But now another arises to address the court, and He speaks to the Judge in this wise: 'What Thou accusest this man of is true; and what Thy book which Thou hast before Thee exacts of him is right. And yet, O Thou righteous Judge! Thou must let this man go free. What Thy book says that he ought to have done has been done, and whatsoever punishment Thy book pronounces upon his sins they have all been suffered. I have stepped into this man's shoes and have done the good deeds which he omitted and have suffered the punishment for the evil deeds which he has committed, and this counts the same as if he had done it himself, because I did it in his stead. And now, Thou righteous Judge, Thou must dismiss him from punishment; for Thy justice has received what was due it.

Hearing this the accused, before so downcast and despondent, becomes cheerful; his face brightens, his eyes sparkle and with all confidence turning to the Judge he says: 'My God and my Judge, Thou art just and what the book of Thy law says is right. I have transgressed and justly deserve punishment, but what this Man, Thy Son, my Lord, and Savior Jesus Christ has done is mine, and for His sake Thou shalt be gracious unto me and shalt forgive me all my sins.' And the Judge closes His book;

He has no longer any account against the penitent and *believing* sinner.

This is the procedure in the justification of a sinner, presented in something like court language. And now permit me in a very few words to show that the grace of God alone is the fountain of our justification.

III.

In this text we have an object lesson, illustrating that cardinal truth on which the reformation of the sixteenth century hinged, and which the apostle expresses in the terse words: "We conclude, that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." Rom. 3, 28. That man's own works are excluded and that justification is alone by grace through faith in Jesus Christ could not be pictured more pointedly than it is here. Here are two men; the one's works had been good, the other's works had been bad. The one whose works had been good was not justified; the one whose works had been bad was justified. If man's works would come into consideration as a factor in justification, then certainly the Pharisee must have been justified and the publican condemned. A man's works, whether they have been good or whether they have been bad, are not and never can be the ground of his justification. In this transaction man's works count for nothing. Let carnal reason insist and reiterate a thousand times that, if a man is condemned by his evil works it must consistently follow that he is justified by his good works, we behold here that God has no regard of man's works, but justifies him who appeals to His mercy in Jesus Christ, the true mercy-seat. Where is the boasting of merit? It is excluded. Whether a man has lived like the Pharisee or like the publican, if he is justified at all he is justified on the ground of the atonement for sin in Jesus Christ who of God was made unto us righteousness, and besides whom there is no salvation.

From this it is evident that justification takes place not in us, but outside of us. The act of justification is that God does no more account sin to the penitent and believing sinner, but accounts to him the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and this

declaration takes place in heaven. There God obliterates the remembrance of our sins and substitutes the record that we are sprinkled with the blood of Christ. In justification sin is not eradicated from our nature, but we are declared righteous so that God regards us as though we had not sinned.

From this it is evident, that in this court the lawyer or advocate is all for his client. If this lawyer Jesus Christ did not plead our cause there could be no hope for us whatever, we would remain in condemnation forever. Therefore we must look to this our Advocate; to Him we must cling. That He is our Advocate who has made atonement for us St. John declares in beautiful words when he writes: "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins." 1 John 2, 1. He is our Advocate who pleads our cause with the Father, and He has not only the right to plead for us, He is such an advocate to whose words everlasting Justice must give ear, because He is Himself the propitiation for our sins.

Bow ye low before God, because you have sinned against Him and have deserved His wrath; but behold this Advocate Jesus Christ. Commit your cause into His hands, and be ever ready to say:

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
Dressed in His righteousness alone
Faultless I'll stand before the throne. **Amen.**

XII. SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

TEXT: And again, departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he came unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis. And they bring unto him one that is deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him. And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain. And he charged them that they should tell no man: but the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it; and were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak. Mark 7, 31-37.

The miracles which our Lord Jesus Christ performed in great number during His sojourn upon earth were wrought to prove Himself the Christ, the Son of God, and to awaken faith in us that we might believe on Him, and believing might have life through His name. His miracles prove Him the Savior of the world, sent from God to destroy the power of the devil, to save His people from their sins and to take away the sting of death. Therefore all His miracles are a symbol and a mirror of this His office. He cast out devils bodily to show that He is come to cast out the devil from the heart of man, and to make it a dwelling-place of God, a temple of the Holy Ghost. He healed all manner of bodily sicknesses to show that He is come to heal the soul from all its ailings. He cleansed many from bodily leprosy, showing that He is come to cleanse the soul from the leprosy of sin. He restored sight to the blind, indicating that He is come to enlighten the soul with heavenly light, and to cause the day-star of hope to arise in the heart. He raised up dead, teaching us that He is come to raise up the soul, dead in trespasses and sins, unto a new and divine life. He made the

lame to walk in token that He is come to teach us who were going astray in the wilderness to walk in the way everlasting. With a word He quieted the winds and the waves, showing that He is come through His Word to allay the storms and turmoils of the conscience, and to give peace and rest to the soul.

So all the miracles of Christ were in keeping with His office. What He did outwardly for the body pictures what He is come to do inwardly for the soul. That all the miracles of Christ had this signification, we see very clearly from an occurrence recorded by Luke in the 9th chapter, where we read that He once sent messengers to a village of the Samaritans, requesting them to grant Him a night's lodging, but the inhabitants of that village refused to receive Him. Angered by this, the disciples James and John proposed to make fire from heaven to fall upon that village, but the Lord rebuked them, saying: "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." Those are remarkable words. Why did the Lord refuse to do what James and John suggested? Would it have been an act of injustice? O no, not by any means. If the wicked are consumed by fire that is not unjust, and, in the times of the Old Testament, the Lord did more than once send fire from heaven to consume the ungodly; but in the days of His flesh He refused to perform such a miracle, because it would not have been in keeping with the office unto which He was sent; for He was not sent to destroy, but to save. Likewise, when some of the Jews asked the Lord to perform a sign in the heavens, that, like Joshua, He should command the sun to stand still, or show some other sign in the firmament, He refused to give such a sign; for by it no deliverance would have been wrought and no good gift bestowed. This is a remarkable characteristic of all the miracles which Christ performed; in every one of them He extended help, wrought deliverance from some evil, bestowed some good gift. Moses and the prophets often performed miracles by which severe punishment was visited on the wicked, but our Lord Jesus Christ never performed a single miracle by which any one suffered the least harm in body or soul. His miracles show His

office that He is come not to destroy, not to judge, not to condemn, but to help, to deliver, to save.

Of such a nature is also the miracle narrated in our text. Let us accordingly consider:

THE HEALING OF THE DEAF AND DUMB A SYMBOL OF THE
HEALING OF THE SOUL.

Two things must here come into consideration:

- I. The condition of this man;
- II. His cure.

I.

Returning from the confines of Tyre and Sidon to the sea of Galilee, Jesus, as Matthew informs us, "went up into a mountain, and sat down there. And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them." Ch. 15, 29. So on this occasion the Lord helped a great number of sufferers; for His fame had spread over the surrounding country, and wherever there were afflicted ones the people hastened to bring them to Him. Out of the great number of afflicted ones healed on that occasion, Mark tells of one in particular. Perhaps this healing took place before Jesus ascended the mountain and became the occasion for the bringing of the other ailing ones. This man was deaf, totally deaf, so that he could distinguish no sound. Therefore the text does not say that he came unto Jesus, it says that he was brought. He could not hear and therefore could not know anything of Jesus, but others brought him to the Lord. Besides being deaf this man was also dumb, although not altogether dumb so that he could have uttered no sounds at all, but he "*had an impediment in his speech.*" He could not speak plainly and correctly. Only with great difficulty could he utter words and then not right; for after he was healed the text says: "*The string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain.*" Hence this man was in a miserable condition: he could not hear and his tongue was bound so that he could not speak right.

Now the bodily condition in which this man was is an illustration, a picture of the spiritual condition of the natural man. In his natural, unconverted state man is deaf in spiritual things, deaf unto that which is truly pleasing to God. The natural man can not perceive or understand spiritual things, as St. Paul testifies: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." 1 Cor. 2, 14. The natural man has no organ with which to discern spiritual things. When he hears the Gospel of Christ it appears to him either as vain and idle talk, or as a hateful doctrine. Therefore his tongue is also bound that he cannot speak the praise of God. And though the natural man does speak of divine things he cannot speak them right; though he lifts up his voice unto the praise of God, yet his praise is such that it grates harshly in the ears of the Lord of hosts.

That this is the condition of the natural man the Scriptures declare in many passages. Thus St. Paul writes of the unconverted that they are in "the snare of the devil, taken captive by him at his will." 2 Tim. 2, 26. The natural man has not a free will in spiritual things to choose for himself good or evil, but his will is held captive by the devil as in a snare that he can will only that which is pleasing to the devil. The natural man does not know this, he may think himself free, nevertheless his will is held bound in the snare of the devil. And as with the will, so also with the other powers of man. Thus St. Paul writes of the Ephesians: "We all had our conversation in time past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." Ch. 2, 2. Besides the will these two powers are in man: the flesh with its desires and the mind or reason. By these man is controlled and beyond their sphere he cannot go. But the flesh is corrupt and its desires are all evil, as the Scripture says of man: "Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually." Gen. 6, 5. But how about that other, higher power in man, the mind or reason, which is now so greatly extolled and so much worshiped in the

world? What kind of a light is it? St. Paul describes it, Eph. 4, 17, writing: "Walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart." The Gentiles of whom Paul is here speaking were not savages, the fine arts were cultivated and reasonable wisdom was highly developed among them; yet Paul says of them that their heart was blind, their understanding darkened through ignorance, not worldly ignorance, but ignorance in spiritual things so that they walked in vanity. What can man know, and what can he do by the light of reason? By reason man may judge to some extent of what is conducive to his welfare in this world. By reason man can live a reasonable, a civilly moral and virtuous life, as we see in Socrates, Cicero and other heathen. By reason man can know that there is a God who is the first cause of all things, and that this God must be almighty, good, just, that He must be a God who rewards good and punishes sin. But here reason has reached its limits. When it comes to the question, who the true God is and what His will is toward man; how man, being sinful, is to be united with God, or how a sinner may be saved? then reason has "*an impediment in its speech*;" then it can say nothing certain, and what it does say is all wrong and can lead no man unto salvation. You may search through all religions ever brought up by man and you will find, the utmost and highest which reason teaches as to a way unto salvation, is, that man must serve God so diligently and must do so much good as to commend himself to the favor of God; and it is certainly easy to see that this highest and noblest dictum of reason is straight against the Scriptures which say: "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified." Rom. 3, 20.

Not only does reason teach a way unto salvation in which no man can be saved, but it stands opposed to the truth of God, opposed to the way of salvation which God has prepared. When carnal reason hears that in the One God there are three distinct persons, it begins to sneer and pronounces it childish talk that there are Three and yet only One. When reason hears that man

is saved through faith in Christ Jesus, it shakes its head and says: 'What! I should get to heaven because Jesus of Nazareth was crucified by the Jews?' For that doctrine reason has no ear. It says, every man must earn heaven for himself by doing good, and reason counts it a fable that a man should be saved without his own works by the death of Jesus Christ; or it will say, that Christ was a wise and pious man and therefore by imitating Him and doing as He did a man would save himself. The man who judges by the light of reason will always think that he must save himself by his own doings, and that the death of Jesus Christ should save him, seems to him a foolish thing.

No wonder that prophets and preachers of all ages have complained that men did not want to hear the Word of the Lord. To gain an audience Isaiah appealed to the universe, crying out: "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken; I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." Ch. 1, 2. Jeremiah complained: "To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? Behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it." Ch. 6, 10. And this opposition of the carnal mind is not directed only against one or two doctrines, the Bible is full of things which people do not want to hear. That preacher is not yet born who could preach the Bible without incurring the enmity of the carnal minded both in and outside the bounds of the church.

The natural man, being the captive of Satan, will either walk in manifest sins and vices after the lusts of his flesh, or,—and this is the highest which he can do—he will seek righteousness before God after his own mind and reason. And to liberate himself from this condition the natural man can make no move, because the whole man with will, reason and affections is in the power of Satan. The natural man may quit certain vices, but he cannot change his nature or alter his reason, so that it would judge differently. The Gospel of Christ is above the

sphere of the natural man : he has no ear for it, no perception of it, as this deaf man had no perception of sound.

II.

How is man delivered out of his deplorable condition? In like manner as this deaf and dumb man was delivered out of his affliction. This man certainly realized his evil situation. It was to him a sad thing, a daily burden that he could not hear and speak. The natural man must be made to feel the misery of his condition. He must be brought to see that his sins are dragging him down to hell, and that his good works are not a key to unlock for him the gates of heaven. The law must swing its rod over him and must convince him that the wages of his sins is death; for only when man feels the lost condition in which he is, will he be desirous of a savior and ready to receive help.

But this man found no help until he was brought unto Jesus of Nazareth. People must be brought to Jesus. Elsewhere there is no help. Therefore parents are to bring their children to Jesus by bringing them to baptism and instructing them in the saving truth; ministers must bring their hearers to Jesus by preaching to them Christ crucified; church members should bring others to Jesus by persuading them to come and hear the Gospel of Christ. You that are healed by Jesus should bring others who are yet in their sins that they too be made partakers of the balm in Gilead. Have you tasted of the water of life? See thou bring others that they too may drink and thirst no more. Remember the precious word recorded by St. James: "If any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." Ch. 5, 19.

Yet not those that brought this man healed him, neither did they lend a helping hand, but Jesus "*took him aside from the multitude*" and then healed him, and He did it by wonderful means; for He "*put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue.*" Common sense would have exclaimed:

What good can that do? But the man's ears were opened and his tongue was loosed. Jesus gives hearing and speech to the natural man and He does it by His finger, by His Spirit, and by that which has proceeded from His mouth, by His Word. Wonderfully does the Lord go to work in order to heal the soul. By that same Word which seems foolishness to natural reason He enlightens the understanding that man begins to see his salvation in that which he formerly despised as folly, yea perhaps even hated as something evil. Paul regarded the Word of Christ the worst thing on earth, and by that same Word the Lord so enlightened him that he said: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." Rom. 1, 16. Of this same Word the Lord spake to the disciples on the way to Emmaus, and they thereafter declared: "Did not our heart burn within us while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures." Luke 24, 32. Of this same word Philip talked to the eunuch from Ethiopia, and by this Word his understanding was opened that he asked for baptism and went on his way rejoicing. Acts 8.

How can hearing be of any benefit to man if he has no understanding for the truth of the Gospel? We might as well ask: What was the use of bringing that deaf man to Jesus, and what good could it do for Jesus to lay His finger in his ear? It certainly did do good; for it gave the man his hearing. Though you cannot open your own heart and understanding, go to preaching and give attendance to the Word. By and through it the Lord will lay His finger into your heart and will grant you to understand the Scriptures, as He did with the disciples. And if this is not accomplished at once, go again. Do like a preacher must do. When he preaches and people will not hear, should he say then: 'It is no use; it will do no good; better resign and go to shoemaking'? His orders are clear to "preach the word in season, out of season." 2 Tim. 4, 2. If people do not hear one time, perhaps they will the next time. If it sometimes seems that your church-going does you no good, say not: It is no use, keep on and bide the Lord's time. Lend

Him your ear and in His hour He will lay His finger into it and will open it.

Behold, the wonderful works of the Lord! The natural man has no ear for the Gospel of Christ, he regards it a foolish thing that the blood which trickled from the cross on Mount Calvary should cleanse him from sin, but with this same Word the Lord comes to him, and by His Spirit and His power He impresses it upon his heart and opens his understanding that man begins to see in it divine wisdom and says: 'Yes, here is hope for me; here is grace, here is forgiveness, here is righteousness, here is salvation: the Son of God trades with me; He has taken upon Himself my sins and has given me His righteousness, and in it I will be able to stand before God.' Now he sees divine wisdom and divine power, where before he could see nothing but foolishness. The Gospel which formerly was so tiresome to him now becomes to him the sweetest thing on earth, and he now sees that the teachings of reason concerning the way to God are all falsehood, whilst formerly he regarded them as the greatest and only true wisdom. Surely, the conversion of the soul is a miracle infinitely greater than the bodily healing of that deaf man.

I am well aware, my friends, that I am speaking riddles to as many of you as are not yet enlightened by Christ, who yet walk after their own mind and reason. You say in your heart: 'What could faith avail? Is it not a maxim established by common sense that every man shall be judged by the works which his own hands have done? Must then not this truth prevail: Do right and you will fare right?' So common sense argues, but I tell you, your common sense is leading you around in the dark, and if you do not cease listening to common sense and turn to Christ to receive light from Him you will remain in darkness for ever. If you are judged by the works which your own hands have done, a sentence will be pronounced on you which will not be pleasant to hear. Common sense will not save you, and all that common sense teaches will not deliver you from the wages of sin. If the wisdom of reason could have taught us a way leading to heaven, the Son of God would not

have needed to die the death of crucifixion. Alas! that so great a multitude even of those who are called Christians walk after the teachings of their own mind, and think to get to heaven by being good and doing good and say, they could not see why preachers make so much of Jesus Christ. But as certain as this deaf man would not have been healed if he had not come to Christ, even so and more certain will no one get to heaven who does not look for the healing of his soul to Jesus Christ alone; for there is no other physician who could heal from sin. But He is a physician who does truly heal the soul; for of God He is "made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption," 1 Cor. 1, 30, and for this purpose He is come to open our understanding that we may know the will of His Father.

Why then did He forbid the people to spread abroad the fame of this miracle? We cannot positively know His reason for this command to those people. Perhaps it was, because in that same region the people had once before intended to "take him by force to make him a king," John 6, 15, and He had not come to be a worldly king or to bestow earthly benefits on His followers. With Jesus Christ you must not seek worldly advantages. Look to Him for the healing of the soul, and, though you can see but dimly, keep on looking to Him, and you will yet praise Him a Savior indeed; for He has declared and said: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." Is. 45, 22. AMEN.

XIII. SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

TEXT: And he turned him unto his disciples, and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: for I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them. And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor? And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow, when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise. Luke 10, 23-37.

In our days there are many people who by no means come up to the duties of a Christian and yet hope to get to heaven. I refer to those people who never, or rarely ever, go to church, who do not read the Bible and do not pray neither in the morning nor in the evening, and who, although they do not hear and read the Word of God nor call on His name, nevertheless hope that they too will be received into everlasting communion with God. On what do such people base their hope of heaven? They argue in this way: ‘Although we are no church-goers, although

we do not wear out the Bible by reading it, yet we are good people and are doing our duty in this world; we are industrious, honest, benevolent towards others, good citizens, good neighbors and no one has just cause to speak evil of us. Why then should we not get to heaven?' They base their hope of heaven on their morality, honesty and doing right by others, and they think, what more can be demanded of a man than to do right in this world?

Now as a matter of course, we are to avoid wrong and to do what is right towards all men, we are to be law-abiding citizens, good neighbors, and the like; but the question is, whether our morality, integrity and doing right will take us to heaven? Should a man who does not hear the Word of God and does not call on His name in prayer be entitled to a place in heaven simply and only because he does what is right towards his fellow men? If people would only think earnestly they would soon see the folly of such an idea. A comparison will serve to make the point plain. Suppose a rich man has a number of servants, and one of these servants does not think it necessary to hear what his master has to say or to inquire after his will, but claims that he has sufficiently performed his duties by doing good to his fellow servants, will the master be satisfied with that servant? Surely not, but he will say: 'A wicked servant who will not honor and serve his master, but only wants to serve his fellow servants,' and he will discard that servant as a vain and presumptuous fellow, and in this the master would certainly be right, because the first duty of a servant is, to hear and to do what his master says. Just so here. If God had placed us into this world for no other purpose than simply to be of service to one another, then it would be sufficient to possess the favor of God, if we would do what is right and good towards our fellow man; but above all other things God has placed us into this world that we should be unto the praise of His glory, and if any one refuses or neglects the worship of God, though he tries ever so hard to do right towards men, he will be cast out of the house of God as a servant who would not serve the Lord.

But if a man does both, if he does right towards men, and also performs all the works belonging to the worship of God; going to church, reading the Bible, singing, praying and the like, will that save him? In as far as these things are man's own works they can surely not save him. If a man does these things in order to earn heaven thereby he will not be saved; for the Scriptures declare: "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." Eph. 2, 8. But if a man hears the Word of God in order to learn from it the way unto salvation which is prepared and appointed of God he shall be saved; for it is promised: "He that seeketh findeth." Matt. 7, 8. And here let us be eager to seek; for the soul's salvation hangs on the question: Which is the way that in truth leads unto life? That we may not set out on a wrong way let us carefully consider the question of the lawyer:

"WHAT SHALL I DO TO INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE?"

Let me present:

- I. The occasion for this question; and
- II. The Lord's answer.

I.

The occasion for this lawyer's question: "*Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*" were the Lord's words to the disciples: "*Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see; for I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.*" The Lord pronounces the eyes and ears of the disciples blessed, because of what they saw and heard, that they saw and heard Him, saw His deeds and heard His words. Now there are three kinds or ways of seeing and hearing Christ. The one way is to see and hear Him as that lawyer saw and heard Him, as the Scribes and Pharisees, Caiaphas, Pilate and multitudes of the Jews saw and heard Him. They saw Him with their natural eyes and they heard Him with their bodily ears, but they received Him not; their eyes hated the sight of Him and

their ears detested His words or they turned from Him to go the one to his farm and the other to his merchandise, and therefore their seeing and hearing Him resulted only in their greater damnation, because with seeing eyes they did not see and with hearing ears they did not hear, as Isaiah had foretold. Though their eyes saw the Son of God and their ears heard His words of divine wisdom and power, yet they went down to destruction, because they hardened their hearts against Him. The mere bodily hearing and seeing Christ cannot save. This is a truth which we should well remember. We must not think that the mere bodily hearing and reading of Christ's Gospel would save. Many read the Word with their eyes and hear it with their ears and yet they are not saved, because they read and hear with the eyes and ears only, and not also with the heart and soul.

Unto this lawyer, to the Scribes and Pharisees and that whole generation of the Jews great mercy was shown in this that the Son of God walked bodily among them, that their eyes saw Him and their ears heard His words. In this they were favored above all other generations, yet the majority of them turned this blessing into a curse unto themselves. So we too are highly favored; whilst many millions of heathen have not the Word of God and sit in the shadow of death, our eyes can daily read it; Sunday by Sunday our ears can hear it proclaimed. Let us be vigilant lest the devil make the very abundance with which we are blessed a snare to entangle our souls in destruction. We must be watchful lest we become oversatiated or so accustomed to the Word that our hearts find no more taste or savor in it, and our hearing and reading be performed only in a perfunctory manner. What man has in abundance, he is much disposed to esteem little. Let us always so occupy ourselves with the Word of Christ that the Lord must not say of us: 'Your eyes read and your ears heard my Word, but your hearts were far from it.' Whenever we read or hear the Word we should, like Mary, set aside all other things and give attendance to what the Lord has to say unto us.

The second kind of seeing Christ is to see Him spiritually, alone with the eye of faith. So the believers of the Old Test-

ament saw Him, as He says of Abraham: "Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad." John 8, 56. The fathers saw Christ in the promises of grace and in the manifold types and ceremonies of the Mosaic law. So we, the believers of the New Testament, see Him in the Word of the Gospel and in the sacraments. We see Him spiritually, if we see in Him our Savior, which in other words is believing in Him. Of this kind of seeing Him the Lord says: "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." John 20, 29. This is the kind of seeing Christ which brings eternal life. The believer sees Christ by faith, the eye of the soul, seeing in Jesus of Nazareth the One who saves him from his sins. But the glass in which we see Christ is His Word. Therefore, whenever we occupy ourselves with the Word we should so look into it as to see Christ our Savior in it.

The third kind of seeing Christ is to see Him both bodily and spiritually at the same time. So the disciples saw Him. They saw Him as this lawyer did, and they also saw Him as Abraham did. Whilst therefore the Scriptures, in general, pronounce those blessed who see Him spiritually through faith, the Lord here pronounces the disciples blessed for seeing Him both spiritually and bodily. They were doubly blessed. Many prophets and kings desired that their eyes might rest on the Messiah. Hear David sigh: "Oh, that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! when the Lord bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad." Ps. 53, 6. And we too, when we consider that He is the Son of the living God come down from heaven to help us, that He shed His heart's blood to prepare for us mansions in the house of His Father; remembering these things the heart sighs: 'Oh that my eyes could rest upon Him, that my arms could embrace Him! Oh that I could kneel before Him and thank Him! Blessed the eyes of Peter; for they saw Him. Blessed the head of John; for it rested on His bosom. Blessed the hand of that Samaritan woman which proffered Him a refreshing drink of water.' A heart loving Jesus would fain be with Him to serve Him as those women from Galilee. Yet our hearts

should be filled with thankfulness and our lips with praise, because He has so superabundantly blessed us in giving us His Word and has opened our inner eye to see Him therein as in a glass. And when oftentimes a mist gathers before our eyes and threatens to hide Him from our sight, we should nevertheless steadfastly cling to His promises, knowing that the time is coming, when we shall see Him face to face.

By these words of the Lord, a certain lawyer felt greatly offended. The Lord spake these words in the presence of a great multitude of people, yet privately to the disciples, that is, He addressed them to the disciples in such a manner that every one could see He was speaking to them in particular. Now to this lawyer it seemed an offensive thing that the Lord pronounced the disciples blessed simply for seeing and hearing what they did see and hear. So he stood up and said: "*Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*" This question occurs several times in the Scriptures. When Peter had preached the first Pentecost sermon the multitude asked: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Acts 2, 37. They meant to say: 'We see that we have sinned, and what shall we do to become rid of sin and to escape the wrath of God?' When that prison keeper asked Paul and Silas: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Acts 16, 30, he meant to say: 'I am lost and see no way to salvation; can you tell me how to be saved?' But from an altogether different sentiment did this lawyer bring up this question. He meant to say: 'I know very well what a man must do to be saved, but since you call these blessed because of their seeing and hearing, I should like to know what you have to say as to the way to eternal life.' He did not want instruction from the Lord, he thought himself wise and was ready for a debate. This lawyer thought the way to win eternal life was by doing the law, and he considered it a destructive heresy to teach salvation by grace, alone through hearing and seeing, that is, through faith. The same sentiment is entertained by all self-righteous people. They all think the way to heaven is by keeping the commandments and doing what is right.

II.

The Lord knew very well what induced this lawyer to bring up this question and what his object was. Therefore the Lord, in His answer, refers him to the law, saying: "*What is written in the law? how readest thou?*" Now the lawyer had an opportunity to show his wisdom, and he did prove that he had studied the law; for he answered: "*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.*" His answer proves that this man did know something about the law; for he does not enumerate all the commandments, neither does he mention any particular one, he gives a brief summary of the whole law and he gives it correctly; for these two commandments comprise all the law. Therefore the Lord answered: "*Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.*"

Is perhaps one present who thinks himself a fit subject for heaven because of his piety and doing right? If so he will argue: 'Behold there, a round, sound, straightforward Scripture declaration, spoken by the Lord Himself: "*This do, and thou shalt live.*" Is not that a plain, simple way to heaven, and is it not far preferable to that other way which these old-fashioned Gospel preachers talk about so much, by grace through faith in the righteousness of another?' This language of the self-righteous is nothing strange. The way of the law is the way which the natural man who has not the Spirit of Christ wants to go. He prefers it far above the way of repentance and faith.

But is not this really a way to heaven? I answer: Certainly it is. The Lord says it: "*This do, and thou shalt live.*" Every one that does these two commandments shall live. Do you say: 'Well then I will set out on this way'? Friend, if you are minded to try this way I can of course not prevent you, but I am sorry for it and advise you not to undertake it. Let me tell you my reasons. In the first place, there is a condition attached here: "*This do.*" To get to heaven in this way you

must do these things. You must love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself, and remember, when the Lord says a thing He means it. You must not only pretend or imagine that you are doing it, you must *really* do it; you must do it not only outwardly, but with your whole heart and soul; you must do it not in part only, but in full, and you must do it not sometimes only, but every day and hour of your life. If, for instance, your part of the line fence between you and your neighbor is blown down, you must be glad that it was your part of the fence and not your neighbor's, and never a thought or wish must come up in your heart that it should rather have been the other part of the fence; for if any such thought does come to you, you sin against both these commandments; you sin against God, because you criticise Him for not directing that gust of wind in another way, and you sin against your neighbor by wishing that harm had come to his property rather than to yours. You say: 'Well, but no man on earth can prevent such thoughts from coming up in the mind.' See, Friend, that is just the reason, why I advise you not to undertake to get to heaven in this way, because you cannot keep these commandments. To a certain extent you may restrain your hand from performing evil deeds, but you cannot prevent your heart from sinning both against God and man. You are sold under sin; your heart is of such a nature that you cannot prevent it, it will bring forth sinful thoughts. In the second place, I advise you, before setting out on this way, to consider whether you have kept these commandments in time past. Supposing it possible that you could do them to-day and to-morrow, what would that help you, if you have not done them yesterday? The Lord will ask an account of each and every day, and if in any day of your life you have not kept every letter of these commandments in spirit and in truth you will be found wanting in the scales of justice.

And think not that you will be able to justify yourself as this lawyer attempted to justify himself by raising the question: "*And who is my neighbor?*" The scribes and Pharisees corrupted the law of God by their traditions. Their doctrine

on this point is introduced in the Sermon on the Mount where the Lord says: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy." Matt. 5, 43. The Pharisees discriminated between neighbor and enemy, and they taught, a man should love his neighbor, but to his enemy he owed neither love nor help. This doctrine afforded opportunity in most cases to claim that one in need was not their neighbor, and in the light of this doctrine it is easy to understand the conduct of those two men in the parable which the Lord here introduced. When the priest saw that wounded man he muttered: An unfortunate traveler; needs help, but I can not tarry in this unsafe region. Probably his friends will look after him.' The Levite, coming near, said: 'I must go and look on him and see if I have any duty of love toward him. If he is an enemy of mine, I will rejoice over his misfortune; if a friend, then he is my neighbor and I must help him; but no, he is an utter stranger and I have no obligations whatever toward him.' So we can picture the thoughts of those two men, because this was in keeping with their doctrine and belief. But in a masterly manner did the Lord refute the lawyer by simply inverting his own question, and saying: "*Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves?*" Put in this form the question comes home to each and every one. Rather than seek an excuse to ignore the poor and needy we should ask ourselves: Am I a neighbor to others, loving them as I ought and helping them as I should? and putting this question to yourself you will soon come to see that you have not come up to the command: "*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*"

Finally, I ask you to consider the awful consequences, if you fail in the very least. The condition is: "*This do.*" Hence, if you undertake to get to heaven by the way of the law and are found lacking in any particular, you shall not live, but die, as the law says: "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." Gal. 3, 10. All those who attempt to gain heaven by doing these commandments will fail; they will not enter the new Jerusalem;

the curse will fall upon them; for "as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse." Gal. 3, 10. The Lord says: "*This do,*" and no one that has not done it will live thereby. The way of the law is truly a way to possess eternal life, and the angels of heaven do walk in this way and live by their own righteousness, because they have never violated the law, but for sinners it is out of the question to reach heaven in this way.

Why then did the Lord say this? Why did He tell this lawyer to do what he could not do? Simply to convince him that in this way he could not be saved. If a man has the idea that he can walk on the water, then surely the strongest argument which I can bring to cure that man of his fancy is to tell him to go and do it. If you think that you can do this impossible thing, that you can keep the law, then go and do it. If words can not convince you of your error, experience will, and God grant that this may be before you are summoned to appear before the judgment-seat of God.

But as to you who even now ask in the spirit of those three thousand at Pentecost: "*What shall I do to inherit eternal life?*" let me tell you: There was a man rich before God, pleasing to God in all things, but a thief came upon him, stripped him of his treasures, and wounded him and left him half dead, bodily alive, but spiritually dead. A lawyer came along, and seeing the man and his position, began to give him commandments: "*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself,*" and gave him the promise: "*This do, and thou shalt live,*" but the half dead man could not begin to do it and it helped him nothing. Another came along and seeing the wounded man had compassion on him, went to him, opened his treasures and poured healing oil into the wounds, lifted up the wounded man and took him to his own house. You are the half dead man. You were born in the likeness of your father Adam; you came forth from your mother's womb half dead, bodily alive, spiritually dead. Moses came along and tells you: "*This do, and thou shalt live,*" but the law is spiritual and you being spiritually dead can not begin to do it and it helps you nothing. But Another comes along, and see-

ing you lying in your blood has compassion on you and without requiring any thing of you, solely at His own cost and risk, binds up your wounds and takes you to the house of many mansions. It is He of whom Paul writes: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." 1 Tim. 1, 15. To this Savior of sinners resign thyself and thou art saved. AMEN.

XIV. SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

TEXT : And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off : and they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks : and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering, said, Were there not ten cleansed ? but where are the nine ? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way : thy faith hath made thee whole.—Luke 17, 11-19.

Of the latter days of the world our Lord Jesus Christ prophesied and said that faith would diminish and love grow cold ; for thus He asks : “ When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth ? ” Luke 18, 8. And again, speaking of the last times, He says : “ Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.” Matt. 24, 12. As the Lord foretold even so it is in our days. Infidelity, skepticism and selfishness are predominant in the midst of Christendom and even with the true children of God faith is little and love weak.

This littleness of faith and weakness of love is manifested in the fact that there is so little giving of thanks and praise of God. Where there is much faith and love there is much giving of thanks, but we children of these latter evil days are slow to give thanks unto God, and quick to complain and murmur. This ought not so to be. Our Lord Jesus Christ set us a very different example. He was not slow in giving thanks and praise unto God. In the 11th chapter of Matthew He says : “ I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth ; ” and at the grave of Lazarus He “ lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank

thee that thou hast heard me." John 11, 41. Jesus sought not His own honor, His whole life in the flesh was to glorify the Father. The apostles, as faithful disciples of the Lord, walked in His footsteps and were instant and fervent in giving thanks unto God. All his letters to the churches does Paul begin with thanks and praise. To the Romans he writes: "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all;" to the Corinthians he says: "I thank my God always on your behalf;" to the Philippians: "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all, making request with joy." The primitive Christians faithfully imitated the apostles in giving of thanks. From heathen historians we know that in times of persecution the Christians would assemble in cellars, caves, forests and like places jointly to give thanks and sing praises to God.

Should I begin to quote from the inspiring songs of the man after the heart of God? Open the book of Psalms and you will find it full of thanksgiving and praise. At all times from the beginning of the world the children of God have been wont to give thanks to God daily, and the lips of many were open unto praise while their bodies were writhing under the hand of the executioner. The giving of thanks will also be the occupation of the saints in heaven. In the kingdom of glory there will be the rendering of thanks to the King of glory; they will sing praises unto God and the Lamb, and will not tire of it from eternity to eternity.

If we would be one with all the saints in heaven and upon earth we must give thanks to our God. All the children of God give thanks unto God, and if we would be one with them we must unite with them in giving of thanks. Is it right and comely if we Christians day by day are groveling in the pit of despondency and low-spiritedness, never able to lift up the soul unto a hymn of praise? Is that becoming to the children of the Most High? Do not honor, and praise, and glory, and thanksgiving belong to Him for evermore? And how could we be His children if we do not give unto Him that which is due His holy name? Let me to-day set before you;

WHAT SHOULD CONSTRAIN US CHRISTIANS FERVENTLY TO
GIVE THANKS TO GOD.

Three reasons for thankfulness do we learn from this text:

- I. Because we have God to thank for all things;
- II. Because thankfulness is pleasing, unthankfulness odious to God; and
- III. Because the thankful receives more, the unthankful loses what he has.

I.

In the first place we learn from our text in a general way that we have God to thank for all things which conduce to our bodily and spiritual welfare. To Him we must give thanks for the hearing of our prayers. The ten leprous men cried unto the Lord: "*Jesus, Master, have mercy on us,*" and He heard their cry and answered: "*Go shew yourselves unto the priests.*" He was quick to hear and ready to answer, as the Psalmist says of the Lord: "O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come." Ps. 65, 2. God hears our prayers; therefore we should be instant in prayer, and should be ready to return thanks for the hearing of our prayers, as He has commanded: "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." Ps. 50, 15.

Those ten leprous men perhaps expected the Lord to answer their petition in a different manner than He did. Though God do not answer our prayers according to our will and wish, yet He does hear according to His wisdom and mercy, and we should always ascribe to Him the honor that He hears prayer, knowing that not a sigh of a believing Christian can remain unheard.

The gifts of God are twofold: temporal and spiritual. These ten lepers besought the Lord to heal them from a bodily disease, and He told them to go show themselves to the priests and "*as they went they were cleansed.*" To the Lord they owed their restoration to bodily health, and surely all ten should have returned to give Him thanks. If we enjoy sound health, it is the gift of God; for "in him we live, and move,

and have our being." Acts 17, 28. And if after sickness we are restored to health we owe our restoration to God, and we should not be like the infidels who thank the doctor for deliverance out of bodily misery, but never think of returning thanks to God. It is God who has indued plants and minerals with healing qualities and has given to man understanding to find out these qualities and to apply them, and it is God who causes medicines to produce wholesome effects. These remedies which God has given in nature we are to use in sickness, and we should in no way despise them. When you are sick, be not a presumptuous enthusiast, expecting and even demanding God to perform a miracle with you and to heal you without using the means which He has given. Rightly does the book Ecclesiasticus say: "The Most High hath created medicines out of the earth; and a wise man will not abhor them. The virtue of these things is come to the knowledge of men, and by these he shall cure, and shall allay their pains." Ch. 38, 4. To despise the gift is an insult to the Giver. Despising the remedies which God has given is despising the Creator, and there is no promise that God will hear the prayers of those who will not use the means which He has given. Yet when we are healed our thanks do not belong to plants and minerals, they belong to God. It is God that gives to our bodies health, strength and vigor, as He said unto Israel: "I am the Lord that healeth thee." Ex. 15, 26.

As the health of the body, so all temporal things which we possess and daily enjoy, come from God; they are His gifts. The raiment which protects, the food which nourishes our bodies, the songsters of the forest ravishing the ear, the flowers of the field delighting the eye,—all is from Him. Industry and skill are means through which God gives His gifts, nevertheless He is the Giver; from Him are both means and gifts. "There is but one God, the Father, and of him are all things; and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him." 1 Cor. 8, 6. God is the Maker of the earth and all that therein is; He divides to each one his portion, and He is profuse in giving. To Him we owe thanks for all earthly blessings.

Did you ever thank God that you enjoy sound health, sharp eyesight, good hearing? Did you ever thank God that you are a human being having reason and understanding, and not a brute? Did you ever thank God that you daily have pure air to breathe and fresh water to drink? Did you ever thank God that you are not a penniless beggar, but have a home to dwell in? These and a thousand other things we daily have, enjoy, use and, by the deceit of the devil and the flesh, also abuse; but we regard them as things that must be so, for which we owe no thanks. Yea, so perverse is the heart that it will overlook a hundred blessings and will go sorrowing all the day long, because it lacks one thing which it craves. We continually enjoy the most precious gifts of God, but when do we ever think of giving thanks to God? We will eat an apple, enjoy the flavor thereof and throw away the core, but seldom the thought will enter our mind, how good God is who created the apple-tree and caused that apple to grow. Surely, we daily commit much sin even in this one thing that we do not give thanks unto God. Sometimes a feeling of gratitude will arise in the heart, but it does not stay long, neither does it come too often, and what would we have if God would measure His gifts in proportion to our thanks? Paltry little indeed.

This shows us another great reason for thankfulness unto God, because He is "merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth," Ex. 34, 6, and can have patience with us mortals who are so sinful and faulty and thank Him so little. That God must verily be good who to-day blesses us anew, although yesterday we did not thank Him for His gifts. O let us shake off the spirit of slumber! Let us open our eyes to see how the goodness of God encompasses us anew every morning, and let us give thanks unto Him alway for all things.

Leprosy, of which our Lord cured these ten men, according to the Scriptures is a figure of sin. This is evident from the fact that in the law of Moses the judgment over leprosy was given to the priests. Therefore the Lord tells these men to go and show themselves to the priests. Leprosy being a figure of sin the healing of these men teaches us that Jesus is the One

who heals us from sin, the leprosy of the soul. As we have God to thank for all temporal gifts, so likewise for all spiritual gifts. As those ten men owed the Lord thanks for their cleansing from bodily leprosy, so we have God to thank for the cleansing of our souls from sin. To Him alone belongs the praise for all spiritual gifts. In our age many have returned again to the Romish doctrine taught before the reformation, that man can merit grace and forgiveness, or can at least do something to place himself into possession of the spiritual gifts of God. If this were true, then the honor for the obtaining of these gifts would accrue to our own efforts, and teaching men so is robbing God of the honor which belongs to Him and giving it to man, which is both against our text and many unmistakable testimonies of the Scriptures. How did these lepers obtain faith in Christ? Certainly in no other way than by the report which they had heard of Him. By it the trust that Jesus would help them was created in their hearts and so they came to call upon Him. A very plain word is that which the Lord spake by Ezekiel, saying unto Israel: "When I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live." Ch. 16, 6. Not because of any thing which we had done, or had omitted to do did God confer His gifts upon us; when He saw us lying in our blood He said unto us, Live, and adopted us for His children and heirs in Christ Jesus. Him we have to thank for it, and not ourselves; for "to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputed righteousness without works." Rom. 4, 5.

Are these spiritual gifts so great that we should be in duty bound to give thanks for them morning and night? O we were slaves of the devil held captive by him at his will, and, moved by His free grace in Christ Jesus, God broke our chains and made us free, so that we now have the blessed hope of everlasting life before us, and should that not be thankworthy? Yea, so perfectly has God for Jesus' sake cleansed our souls from sin,

as those ten men were cleansed from leprosy. In them surely not a scab remained from the crown of the head even unto the sole of the foot; for Christ's works are perfect. Even so clean are our souls from sin in the sight of God when washed in the blood of Jesus. Did you this morning thank God for the cleansing from sin in the blood of Jesus? Did you do it yesterday? Or did you do it some time ago? Why, O why dost thou not give thanks unto God, "who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies." Ps. 103, 3.

II.

In the second place, we learn from our text that we should be moved to give thanks to God, because thankfulness is pleasing, unthankfulness odious to the Lord. We owe all things to God, and what an abominable thing must it be in His sight, if our hearts are ungrateful and our lips do not give thanks to Him. When one of those ten men returned glorifying God with a loud voice, fell on his face and gave thanks the Lord was well pleased and he spake words of tender kindness to that man; but seeing that of ten only one returned to give Him thanks, His soul was grieved and He brake forth into bitter complaint, saying: "*Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.*" Profusely does God bestow His gifts upon men, and He rejoices over those that return to give Him thanks, but He is sad to see men receive His gifts with ungrateful hearts and thankless lips. To give thanks to God is the greatest and noblest work which we Christians can do, and there is not a more hateful thing, than unthankfulness toward God. In a sermon on this text Dr. Luther says: "This is the right worship of God, to return glorifying God with a loud voice. This is the greatest work in heaven and earth, and the only one which we may do for God; for of other works He stands in need of none, neither is He benefited by them." Luther is surely right; for we have nothing to give to God, because what we have is all His

gift; but this we may do, we may return thanks to Him for the goodness and mercy with which He blesses us, and that this is well pleasing to Him we learn from His words in the 50th Psalm, saying: "If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the Most High." We are to bring offerings to God, yet not as though He stood in need of them or as though He could be enriched by our gifts; His are the mines of gold and silver and the cattle upon a thousand hills; yea, even that which we give is already His; but this He desires, and this is a sweet-smelling savor unto Him, if we offer unto Him thanksgiving.

This text shows how the Lord regards unthankfulness. Sad words of bitter complaint does He utter concerning the ingratitude of those nine men. And justly so; for He had cured them of the most horrible disease under the sun, and they thanked Him not. What the Lord experienced with those men is still the way of the world, and, alas, the way of many that are called Christians. When God after a protracted drought sends refreshing rain, how many thank Him for it? Barely one out of ten. But what the world does not do the Christians should do. They should offer to God thanksgiving with rejoicing, because He has declared: "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God." Ps. 50, 23. Yes, upon the thankful, God multiplies His gifts and shows them His salvation.

III.

Therefore, in the third place, we are to give thanks unto God, because the thankful receives more, the unthankful loses that which he had. Those ten men all had faith in the Lord. The trust that He could and would help them caused them to call upon Him, and when He said: "*Go shew yourselves unto the priests,*" their going manifested implicit faith in His words. They all received what they desired and believed, they were all cleansed from their leprosy. One of them returned to give

thanks to the Lord, and he did not only keep the faith which he had, but he received more; his faith was confirmed and established anew by the Lord's words, saying unto him: "*Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.*" This man could verily go his way with a clear conscience and a rejoicing heart, because he knew that the good pleasure of the Lord was resting upon him. But those nine ungrateful ones did not receive more, they lost even what they had. They did not become leprous again, the gift of bodily health was not withdrawn from them, but they lost their faith and their good conscience. They were now cured and were free to go to their homes, but they did not carry a joyous heart in their bosom like the Samaritan, they were rather pursued by the consciousness of having acted wickedly towards Him who had restored them to health. So it is; he that gives thanks to God receives more and more, but the ungrateful loses that he has, as the Lord says, Matt. 13, 12: "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath." The thankful receives grace for grace, but, touching the unthankfulness of the Gentiles, Paul writes: "When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened." Rom. 1, 21. The ungrateful sink into misery and from darkness into darkness. This is most manifest in the spiritual gifts of God. If God has kindled a little faith in us and has given us a little light and we give thanks to Him, then we grow in faith and knowledge; but if a Christian who has tasted the good gift of God becomes ungrateful, he quickly loses what he had and falls into greater darkness than before. Would you grow after the inner man, would you be rooted and grounded in faith and love? Let thankfulness dwell in your heart and praise on your lips. "O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good; for his mercy endureth forever." AMEN.

XV. SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

TEXT : No man can serve two masters : for either he will hate the one, and love the other ; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink ; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment ? Behold the fowls of the air : for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns ; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they ? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature ? And why take ye thought for raiment ? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow ; they toil not, neither do they spin : and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith ? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat ? or, What shall we drink ? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed ? for after all these things do the Gentiles seek : for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness ; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow : for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.—Matt. 6, 24-34.

From this text we learn that our Lord Jesus Christ found it necessary to warn His own faithful followers against the service of mammon and against anxious cares for food and raiment. That the world seeks after the things of this earth is not strange : earth-born mortals are earthly-minded. With the children of the world it is necessary to preach that their earthly-mindedness will bring them to grief, that the hope of those who set their affections on the earth and that which is of the earth will perish. The lover of this earth must be told that “ the world passeth away, and the lust thereof,” 1 John 2, 17, in order to awaken him to a sense of the importance of seeking after that which will abide, when heaven and earth shall pass away.

But why should this sermon be necessary for the followers of

our Lord Jesus Christ? Why necessary for those whose hearts and hopes are not on the earth beneath, but in heaven above? Are they not the children of God minding the things of their Father? Do they not say: "Here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come." Heb. 13, 14. Why warn those against earthly-mindedness who are not earthly-minded? The reason is obvious. It is because the children of God in this world are not yet perfect in sanctification. By the new birth they have obtained a new heart and a new mind, so that they delight in that which is of heaven heavenly, but the old nature is not yet altogether taken away from them. There is still that serpent-seed in them which finds delight only in that which is of the earth, which loves money and riches, and is always inclined to mistrust the providence of God. This old nature is continually enticing the children of God to turn their eyes away from the new heaven and the new earth which they expect and love, and to look again to the old earth with its gold and silver, its broad acres and deceitful cares. And, alas! it is a fact which is not to be denied that many a Christian who once was a zealous lover of our Lord Jesus Christ and who, by the grace of God, victoriously withstood all other temptations of the evil one, gradually permitted the love of money and the cares of this world to take possession of his heart and so erred from the faith. Thus St. Paul writes sorrowfully of one of his companions: "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." 2 Tim. 4, 10, and of those like unto the seed sown among thorns the Lord says that they "are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection." Luke 8, 14. If the devil sees that he cannot fell a Christian by seducing him to infidelity or some flagrant sin, he will frequently try to entangle him in money-making, or worldly business, or anxious cares about making provision for his family, and but too often he is successful. The old man is ever drawing the heart to the love of earthly things, and so soon as a Christian begins to give way to him, he begins to grow lukewarm in spiritual things.

Therefore the sermon which the Lord preaches in this text is necessary both for the children of the world and for Chris-

tians, those who are not earthly-minded, but who, so long as they live on earth, are always in danger of becoming earthly-minded again. To warn His disciples against this temptation is the Lord's object in our text, in which He inculcates both the harmfulness of the service of mammon, and the vanity and uselessness of anxious cares for food and raiment. But the most effectual weapon against worrying, the Lord mentions in the second last verse saying: "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*" Here we have

THE LORD'S TWOFOLD REMEDY FOR ANXIETY ABOUT FOOD
AND RAIMENT.

We ward off anxiety

I. By doing the Lord's command: "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness:*" and

II. By trusting the Lord's promise: "*And all these things shall be added unto you.*"

I.

In this text the Lord first of all directs us to the source whence solicitude and anxious cares spring, the service and love of riches, saying: "*No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*" The Lord lays it down as an unalterable truth that no one can be a servant of God and a servant of mammon at the same time. To unite the service of God and the service of mammon is as impossible as a union between light and darkness, Christ and Belial. Attempting to serve both God and mammon at the same time is attempting to do what the Lord pronounces impossible.

The reason why no man can do both at one and the same time is contained in the words: "*Either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other.*" What man can serve two masters who are against each other, the one commanding what the other forbids? God com-

mands: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," but mammon says: 'Give me thy heart.' God says: "Trust not in uncertain riches, but in the living God," 1 Tim. 6, 17; but mammon says: 'Trust me; I will get you any thing you want.' God says: "To do good, and to communicate forget not," Heb. 13, 16; but mammon says: 'You must not give, you must gather.' God and mammon are two contrary masters, and it is an utter impossibility to serve both at the same time. As little as you can have your eye turned to the sky above and to the earth beneath at the same moment, even so little and much less can your heart have its treasure in heaven and at the same time fix its affections on mammon. The heart cannot be God's and gold's at the same time, it will belong either to God or to gold. If mammon is the heart's love, the love of God has no place there; for John distinctly writes: "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." 1 John 2, 15.

This service of mammon is a fruitful mother of many cares and anxiety about earthly things, as is very clear from the connection of the Lord's words; for after saying: "*Ye cannot serve God and mammon,*" He continues: "*Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.*" These and similar cares belong to the service of mammon and should not be found with Christians, as the Lord declares further on: "*Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek.)*" We Christians are not to be like the heathen who walk in blindness and think they must provide for themselves, wherefore they must necessarily be full of cares and anxieties, because they cannot trust to their idols that these will provide for them. But we unto whom the knowledge of Divine providence shines are to do as the Lord bids us: "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.*"

Surely, it is the mouth of Wisdom that spake these words. He tells us to drive away care with care, to put down worldly cares with heavenly cares. Doctors will kill disease in the system by giving an antidote, and the Lord here also recommends

to us an antidote: care against care. As a farmer will make a thorny and weedy field clean by plowing it up and sowing good seed into it, so the Lord would have us make the heart clean from cares and anxieties for the things of this world by displacing them with cares for the soul. Instead of seeking after riches, or harassing the mind with perplexing cares about food and raiment, this should be our care, to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and if this care fills the heart there is no room in it for worldly cares. This is an approved antidote; try it, and you will find it an infallible remedy. As your seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness will increase, so the desire for earthly riches and the anxiety about provision for the body will decrease, because you will soon learn to say with David: "The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver." Ps. 119, 72. "The salvation of the righteous is of the Lord: he is their strength in the time of trouble. And the Lord shall help them, and deliver them." Ps. 37, 39.

Even that old heathen Seneca writes: "I am better and born for higher things, than to be the slave of my body." If a heathen considered it an unworthy thing to have no higher aim than to care for the welfare and enjoyment of the body, much less should we Christians be enslaved by cares for the body, we who have been born again "unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven." 1 Pet. 1, 3. That incorruptible and unfading inheritance is something worth caring for. It is better to ask: How shall I make sure of the inheritance of the saints in light? than to fret about next year's harvest, or to worry the mind with the question: Will I be able to leave a plantation to each of my sons when I come to die? "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God.*"

What kingdom of God? God has a kingdom of power in which He, the Supreme Sovereign, rules powerfully over all things in heaven and on earth. In this kingdom He has power to destroy both body and soul in hell, and in it He has power to give a morsel daily to every living thing. The kingdom of

power we need not seek ; for we, together with all created things, are continually in it. But God has another kingdom, a kingdom which He did not establish simply by His almighty : " Let there be ;" a kingdom which cost Him infinitely more, which He established by becoming man and suffering and dying, for which He shed His heart's blood : the kingdom of grace. This is the kingdom of which the Lord here speaks, and which St. Paul describes as being " not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Rom. 14, 17. A kingdom of righteousness, as the Lord here adds : "*And his righteousness.*" Seek ye the righteousness of God. What righteousness ? Not His essential righteousness which God has in His own nature ; for that no creature can have. But God has another righteousness which He purchased by the shedding of His own divine blood. This righteousness God did not need for Himself, He prepared it for the children of men, as Paul writes : " Christ Jesus is of God made unto us righteousness." 1 Cor. 1, 30. This righteousness is for us. Christ Himself with much labor prepared it for us and promised it unto us, and He bids us seek it.

This is what the Lord here offers to us, God's kingdom and God's righteousness. Of these He desires us to be partakers. Is it something worth seeking after ? Surely, if we are in that kingdom of God in which He rules as a gracious and merciful father, then we know that we are safe and will stand in need of nothing ; for God is not a king who would permit the enemies to destroy His subjects, or would suffer His citizens to lack any needful thing. And if we possess the righteousness of God we know that no creature can lay any thing to our charge, because in this Divine righteousness there can be neither flaw nor defect.

This kingdom and this righteousness the Lord bids us seek. Why must this kingdom be sought ? Because it is of a different nature than the kingdom of power. Into the kingdom of power we were born, but in this kingdom of grace we are not by nature. The kingdom of power is everywhere, but the kingdom of grace is not everywhere, it is there where the Word and the Sacraments are. It is the Word by which the kingdom of grace is planted

in us, as the apostle writes: "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God," Rom. 10, 17, and through the Sacraments this righteousness of God is conveyed to us, as Peter said to the multitude on Pentecost: "Be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins." Acts 2, 38. In the Word and the Sacraments the kingdom of God and His righteousness come to us; in these we must seek them.

Shall we seek? "*Seek ye,*" says the Lord. Here we should seek with all our heart and all our energies. Here we should seek like that shepherd his lost sheep, like that woman her lost piece of money, like miners a vein of precious ore. Seek the kingdom of God; seek it by repentance. If you daily sin you must daily seek grace unto forgiveness. Seek it by diligently hearing the Word of God. Seek His righteousness. In yourselves you will find no righteousness. You once did possess righteousness in Adam, but it was lost through sin, and now Jesus Christ is made unto you righteousness. In Him, seek it by faith; it is worth seeking. Hear how eagerly Paul sought, how highly he prized this righteousness; "I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Phil. 3, 8. So eagerly did Paul seek, so highly did he prize that righteousness which is imputed by faith that he regarded not the loss of all earthly things, yea rather counted his best and noblest works nothing but dung in comparison to this righteousness. If your heart wants cares, let this be its care to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness. With this care let your soul be filled.

But the Lord adds a word which we must not overlook: "*Seek ye FIRST the kingdom of God.*" Not all and every caring for temporal things is forbidden. In the earthly calling into which a Christian is placed he is to be industrious and faithful; for not only does St. Paul exhort that we should be "not slothful in business," Rom. 12, 11, he also writes: "If any provide not

for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." 1 Tim. 5, 8. When the Lord forbids troubling our minds with anxious cares about food and raiment, He does not mean to recommend slothfulness in our earthly labors, or carelessness in our worldly calling. This is not contradicted by the concluding words of this text: "*Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.*" Putting the words in popular language we might render them thus: Worry not for to-morrow; for to-morrow will have its own worry. The care and preparation which one's calling imposes is commanded, worrying about the result is forbidden. When the farmer wants to seed he must prepare for it in advance. He must hire hands; he must provide seed; he must examine his implements and must get them ready to go to work in the morning. All this belongs to his duty. But when that same farmer in a murky mood begins to say: 'It does not look as though we should have much of a harvest, and I am afraid the prices will be low,' then he is burdening himself with anxiety which belongs to the following year, and which is of no use to him in getting his grain into the ground.

But the cares of our earthly calling are not to be our first and foremost care. "*Seek ye FIRST the kingdom of God.*" To seek the kingdom of God is to be our first, our foremost, our greatest care. To be living members of Christ's spiritual body is to be our heart's most fervent desire. Not only occasionally, but continually our soul should sigh with David: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple." Ps. 27, 4. If this is our daily, our first and foremost care, then whatever may betide, we will be enabled to say with that man after the heart of God: "In the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock." Ps. 27, 5. When the care to be faithful in our temporal calling is subordinate to the desire

for the house of the Lord, then will anxious cares be banished from the heart.

And this is verily something of vital importance to every Christian. The Christian does seek the kingdom of God, and he possesses it in faith, but he lives in the world and he can not help but see the doings of the children of the world round about him. He beholds how they apply their whole energy, all their mind to making money, and frequently he will see them successful in their pursuit after wealth. The flesh and the devil will excite envy in his heart and a desire to keep pace with them, and if the Christian gives room to such thoughts he will soon begin to act up to them, and perhaps before he is aware of it that which formerly was secondary in his heart, his worldly business, is become his foremost care, and the care for the kingdom of God which was foremost is become secondary. Such a man may outwardly remain the same, others may see no change in him, but his heart is changed and is no more the Lord's. Gradually becoming entangled in earthly cares is a rock on which many have made shipwreck, and we must be careful to steer clear of it. Bear in mind always this word of the Lord: "*Seek ye first,*" first and not last, "*seek ye FIRST the kingdom of God and his righteousness.*"

II.

Doing this, we have the glorious promise: "*And all these things shall be added unto you.*" If we seek the kingdom of God first, if we cleave unto the righteousness of faith, if we thus wear the garments of the Son of God, then we have the one thing needful, then we are prepared to stand before the Son of man when He comes; for those who make it the primary object of their life to seek the kingdom of grace on earth are those to whom He will say: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Matt. 25, 34. If this hope lives in our hearts that our ears shall hear these words from the lips of the Lord we should verily leap for joy, even though we possess not a dollar's worth of this world's goods,

But with the Lord there is superabundance of grace. Besides the promise of eternal life to those who seek His kingdom, He has also given this promise: "*And all these things shall be added unto you.*" What things? Why those things needful for the body and the support of this present life. "*Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?*" God has promised food and raiment to His children. When you make a large purchase from a merchant he will throw in an article of more or less value. God, as a rich merchant, offers for sale His grace, the forgiveness of sin, the righteousness of Jesus Christ, His heavenly kingdom. All these He sells for the taking. He cries out to the passers-by: "Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Is. 55, 1. And with those who buy He throws in the promise of food and raiment, that His children shall have something to eat and something to wear. Now if you believe that God gives you His righteousness and heavenly kingdom, what an unworthy thing is it that you doubt Him as to food and raiment which He has promised to throw in? Is that the way for a child to do?

Suppose your boy goes around hanging his head, and questioned as to what ails him he says: I do not know if I shall have something to eat to-morrow. Would you not say: Boy, am not I your father and did I ever let you starve? And if he would say: Yes, but I do not know how it will be to-morrow, would you not say: Child, since when do you no more look upon me as your father? It is certainly something very unchildlike, if we suffer our hearts to be tossed to and fro by gnawing cares. The Lord says: "*Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need*

of all these things," and we ought to trust Him that He will deal with us as a loving Father.

The Lord here directs us to nature. The bird sings, the lily blooms and each creature does what God has made it for, and He provides for it. The butterfly is hatched in spring, spends the summer flitting from flower to flower, never thinking of winter, and in the fall it dies. The ant is never idle, it is busy the livelong summer to lay up a store for winter. Each of them lives according to the instinct with which God has endowed them. To man He gave a heart to trust Him and hands to work with, and said: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." Gen. 3, 19. Like the ant we should be industrious, because through industry God has promised us food, and like the butterfly we should be without cares, trusting the promise of our God. If we would so do we could live far more happily in this world, being spared many a gloomy hour and many a restless night.

What good has worrying ever done you? "*Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?*"

What can these anxious cares avail thee,
 These never ceasing moans and sighs?
 What can it help, if thou bewail thee
 O'er each dark moment as it flies?
 Our cross and trials do but press
 The heavier for our anxiousness.

Every day has its burden, and why make it heavier by adding to it all manner of doubts and fears? Anxious cares are like the red clay on our hills after a summer shower. It clogs the wheels and makes them cumbrous. Away with the impediment, and you can run along lustily. Many of you have the motto in the house: "The Lord will provide." You have it in a frame hanging on the wall. What a blessed thing if you would inscribe it into the heart and practice it.

In restless thought or blank despair,
 Why spend each day and night?
 On Him who made thee cast thy care;
 He'll make thy burden light. AMEN.

XVI. SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

TEXT : And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain ; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow : and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier : and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother. And there came a fear on all : and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us ; and, That God hath visited his people. And this rumor of him went forth throughout all Judea, and throughout all the region round about. Luke 7, 11-17.

This Gospel narrates two occurrences : something very common, and something very extraordinary. The first was the conveying of a corpse to its last resting-place. An every-day occurrence on this earth which is the domain of death. That corpse was not the first, neither was it the last carried out of the gates of Nain. They that carried it were thereafter themselves carried out by others. One generation must carry the other to the grave. Since Eve lent her ear to the wily words of the Serpent, only two of all those naturally born on the earth escaped death : Enoch and Elias, and these two were taken to heaven without dying, not because they had not been subject to mortality, but by a special dispensation of God. To us God has promised no such special dispensation ; we cannot expect to be an exception to the common rule ; we all know that we must die.

The extraordinary occurrence which our Gospel relates is this : The men carrying that corpse intended to take it to the tomb, but they did not. At the gate of the city they were met by a man who put a stop to the whole funeral procession. This man first went to the sorrowing mother and said : "*Weep not,*"

and so He gave light and life to the drooping soul of that mourning widow. Then He touched the bier, saying: "*Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak.*" Those people had set out to inter a corpse, and they returned, bringing back alive him that had been dead. Surely, the inhabitants of Nain had great reason to ask: Who is this man? Who is this man, who calls the dead and they come, who turns the procession of death and mourning into a procession of life and rejoicing? It is He of whom John writes: "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." John 1, 4. He it is that turns death into life and darkness into light. We must die, but Jesus Christ is come to be our life in the midst of death, our light in the midst of darkness.

Because we must die and there is only One who can save in death and from death we ought frequently to consider these two facts; and as this text offers us an occasion let us to-day consider:

THE RIGHT PREPARATION FOR DEATH, ASKING

- I. What is the right preparation for death?
- II. Why is it so necessary to hold ourselves in readiness always?

I.

Death is the most terrible thing on earth, dreaded by every thing living. Let a man be never so fearless, in the presence of death awe will creep over him. The reason why death is something so appalling to man is, because it is the punishment which God has pronounced on disobedience. "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." "The wages of sin is death." Rom. 6, 23. Death did not originate from God; God has pleasure in life and not in death; but by the wiles of Satan sin, and through sin death came into the world. If we were without sin, we would live forever, and would be received into heaven without death. It is because of sin that we must depart from the world in so dreadful a manner. But, whereas death now is in the world and no power or skill of man can do away with it, the great question is: How may we be prepared to meet

death, how rob it of its terrors? On this our forefathers were accustomed to say: "Remember death always; thou must die before thou diest, that thou mayst not die when thou diest; live, as thou wilt wish to have lived when thou comest to die." To be prepared for death we, first of all, must remember death. One who does not remember death cannot be prepared to meet death. An army corps marching on securely and forgetting the enemy is not ready to face him. If a man, forgetting death, lives securely, and when reminded of death seeks to rid himself of that unpleasant thought as soon as possible, he cannot be prepared to look death in the face. Therefore we must frequently remember death and make our heart familiar with the thought of it that it may not take us by surprise. In this many saints of God have set us a good example. Remembering the shortness of his days David prayed: "Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am." Ps. 39, 4. Constantine the Great daily reminded himself of his death, and Amsdorf, one of Luther's associates, had a coffin standing at the side of his bed and stepped on it when lying down and when rising up, that every night and every morning he might be reminded of his death. Our days on earth are as an handbreadth, and at the end thereof is death. The man who does not remember death must be taken by surprise when it comes and will be the more horrified like one suddenly assailed by an unexpected foe, but the Christian who has made himself familiar with the thought of death will meet it as an enemy whose approach is expected.

Remembering death we must live and act as those who bear in mind that they must die. We must live in the world as we will wish to have lived when we come to die. The natural blindness and depravity which is in man continually entice and draw him to live after his own liking. Fascinated by the lust of sin, held in bondage by the affections of the flesh, men live as though there were no death and no judgment. People give their whole mind and soul to following after sin and worldly pursuits, as though death were as far from them as the east is from the west. But though for many years men should lull their conscience to

sleep, there is a time when the eyes of man are opened, when the accuser in the bosom awakes, and that time is the hour of death. When man begins to feel the icy hand of the destroyer upon him, when the doctor steps back from the bedside shaking his head, when the certainty dawns on the mind that the time is come, then the voice in the bosom awakes and says: Thou must go hence to appear before the Judge and to answer for the deeds done in the body. Then woe unto those who, looking back over their bygone life, must confess that there was no fear of God in them, that instead of serving God and their neighbor they walked in selfishness and sin. Then will they wish to have lived differently, and that wish too will intensify their remorse; for the voice within them whispers: Too late; thy time to sow is past, and thy time to reap has come.

To be prepared for death we must betimes lay to heart what is said in the text: "*And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still.*" We must bid the carriers to the grave to stand still. Who are they that carry us to the grave? They are our sins. As many sins, so many carriers to the grave. But commonly there are six coffinbearers. So I would mention six vices which make the apple drop before its time; which deliver many to a premature grave. The first is drunkenness. "Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath wounds without cause? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine." Prov. 23, 29. Drunkenness annually delivers scores to the grave who otherwise for many years more might have lived a godly and sober life. The second carrier to the grave is immorality. If drunkenness kills many, immorality kills more. Of the harlot Solomon says: "She hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death." Prov. 7, 26. Deceived by the carnal lust many sink into an early grave. Mark it, my young friend, and "flee fornication." The third is anger, cares and troubles. Anger shortens life and many cares and troubles weaken the body. Hear it, ye that are full of cares, and cast them upon the Lord. The fourth carrier to the grave is disobedience to parents

and superiors. The fourth commandment promises long life to obedient children; hence shortness of life is threatened to the disobedient, and of the rebellious it is written: "They that take the sword, shall perish with the sword." Matt. 26, 52. As fifth we may mention evil associations. Many an innocent youth mixes with bad company and is early ruined in body and soul. The sixth carrier to the grave is idleness; for idleness is a mother of vice, and every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is cut down. Howbeit all sins are carriers to the grave, and to be prepared for death we must bid these carriers to stand still. Harder is the struggle if a man knows that he is sinking into a premature grave by his own wickedness.

To avoid such remorse on our deathbed we must strive so to walk that we be able to say with St. Paul: "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world." 2 Cor. 1, 12. It is a great advantage, if a man can stretch himself upon his dying couch, and can sincerely say: As my Lord and my God called me with an holy calling, so have I lived to show forth His praise in the world. But to be able to do this we must apply ourselves early to preserve a good conscience, as long as we live. To a right preparation for death belongs the preserving of an unspotted conscience.

Yet these alone—remembrance of death and a moral life—can by no means satisfy conscience and make the soul cheerful in death. Though a man would hourly remember his death and would walk blamelessly in the law, as did the apostle Paul, yet even the best life could not make him desirous to depart. Most people think, if a man lived morally he could die quietly, but that is not true. The man who has nothing better to rely on, than his own preparation, morality and righteousness will be left without true comfort. To have lived piously in the world is indeed a great boon in the hour of death, but the best life can not justify before God; for before Him "we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are as filthy rags." Is. 64, 6. All who depend on their own piety and morality, hoping

in these they would be able to die quietly, deceive themselves with a false comfort, and when death comes their comfort forsakes them; for then the witness in the bosom rises up and says: You must now appear before a Judge who is holy and demands holiness, and you will not be able to stand before Him; for although you have lived morally, yet you have not lived holily. No one depending on his own good life for justification can die cheerfully. The very fact that he must die is an indisputable proof that he is a sinner, because sinless saints are not subject to death. The fact that we must die proves conclusively that we are sinners and that our righteousness is nothing before God, though we had lived ever so blamelessly before men. We must therefore be equipped with a better righteousness than our own to rely on, and with whom to find this righteousness our text indicates. If we have that man with us who stopped the funeral procession at Nain, then we can be cheerful in death.

What Jesus did there at Nain betokens the object of His mission that He is come to deliver from death. Yet He did not come to deliver us from death in the same manner as He did this young man. That would be comparatively a small benefaction, because that youth had to die again; but He delivers from death in the manner St. Paul describes, exclaiming: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. 15, 55. Here Paul names four things in connection: Law, sin, death, grave or hell. The law pronounces the sentence of death on sin, sin delivers the sinner unto death, and death unto hell. Hence the whole deliverance hinges and must hinge on the taking away of sin. Where sin is removed, the law has no power to deliver unto death, because the law is just and can condemn no one to death who has no sin; and where sin is removed, death has lost its sting and hell can no more devour. Therefore Christ took on Himself our sins, and dying on the cross He suffered the punishment pronounced on them by the law, and because He had made full satisfaction for sin the law pronounced Him free from further punishment, and

He rose again from death. Now Christ's victory is ours rather than His, because He battled and triumphed in our stead as our Substitute. Wherefore the apostle does not say that God gave the victory to Jesus Christ, but says: "Thanks be to God, which giveth *us* the victory, *through* our Lord Jesus Christ." Of this victory we become partakers through faith. This is the substance of our Christian faith; Our sins are taken from us and put on Christ; He suffered the punishment and we go free. In this trust the believer can cheerfully face law, death, hell, every thing. To the believer bodily death is no more a punishment of his sins, but a wholesome medicine by which sin is purged out of his members. Through faith the believer knows, though he die his soul cannot fall into damnation, but must live with Christ, and his body must rise again glorified as Christ was glorified.

This faith, and it alone, rightly prepares for death. When this faith becomes alive in the heart the fear of death dies. When the hope of salvation through Jesus Christ roots in the heart, death loses its terrors and its fear vanishes away. As faith increases the fear of death decreases. It still remains true what I said before that every thing living dreads death. The flesh has a dread of death, but by faith the Christian regards death but a dingy doorway into a new and a better life. Therefore, whosoever believes that his sins are taken from him and are put on Christ, and hence that he will no more be held responsible for them, is ready for death, let it come when, where, how, in whatever shape or form it will. Paul comprises this preparation for death in a very few words, writing: "Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience." 1 Tim. 3, 9. We are prepared for death, if we hold the faith in Jesus Christ and strive to preserve an unspotted conscience, and this we should do with all diligence all the days of our life, both when we are young and when we are old. Why?

II.

For death we should be prepared always, because in the midst of life we are surrounded by death. Neither I nor you can know if we will live to see to-morrow's sun

Nain, the Beautiful, perhaps so named because of the beauty of its location between Thabor and Hermon. Nain is an emblem of the world. This world is God's creation, and it is beautiful. The heavens with their sparkling lights, the sky with its tints of blue, the mountains in their silent majesty, the undulating valleys in their verdant green delight the heart of man. When we dwellers in The Valley behold the beauties surrounding us we are constrained to exclaim: "Bless the Lord, all his works in all places of his dominion." Ps. 103, 22.

But into Nain, the Beautiful, crept the ugliest of all monsters, Death. "*Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.*" There were many old people, decrepit and sick in Nain, but death passed them by and stretched out his hand for a boy just blooming into manhood. His limbs were strong and active, the tint of the rose was on his cheeks, his heart beat high with hopes for the future and he calculated on making his mark in the world, but sickness came on, making pale his cheeks and robbing his eye of its lustre, and soon his body was stretched on a plank, stark and cold. True is the adage: The old must die and the young may die. Generally the young do not often think of death. They have set the date of their departure away in the future. But if you will visit our cemetery and compare the dates of birth and death inscribed on the tombstones you will find that not a few die young, and often the young are hastened away quickly by violent sickness. You, whose cheeks are red with the bloom of youth, might in a very few days be like unto the youth in this text, laid on a stretcher. See therefore that you be ready. Let your eye drink in the beauties of God's creation; let your heart be delighted with the music of life, but remember that death is lurking every where in this world, and learn to be pious in your youth. "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." Eccles. 12, 1. What happened to that young man at Nain might happen to you, and it is the part of wisdom for you to be ready.

Neither can we know whether we will have one minute's

time for preparation when death once knocks at our door. Many a one is hurried to eternity in an instant, like Eli who brake his neck falling from a stool, and every one living in sin or not standing in the faith is inevitably and eternally lost if ever taken by a sudden death. Let no man be deceived by the Roman Catholic doctrine of a purgatory, or the modern heresy of another probation after death which is so fast coming to be fashionable. There is no more any probation after death, and from that purgatory to which the souls of the unbelieving and wicked go there is no deliverance. The moment of death decides the eternal and unalterable weal or woe of man; for the Scriptures testify: "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." Heb. 9, 27. And: "If the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be." Eccles. 11, 3. When the trees have been felled there remains this one thing to be done, that the judge come and assort trees which are useful and trees which are fit only for the fire. If men neglect to hold themselves in readiness for death, because they beguile themselves with the hope of another state of probation after death, their expectation will perish when they come to that place whence they will no more depart until they have paid the last farthing. Be ready always; for ye know not the moment of your death.

And if we die as most people do, more or less slowly on a bed of sickness, a thorough preparation is even more necessary; for then comes the last and hottest struggle. Then Satan tries his best, because it is his last chance for that soul. Then he most eagerly applies his devices to shake the faith of the Christian and to draw away his soul from the Word of God. Then he will go back and bring to remembrance sins committed perhaps fifty years ago, and he will pile sin upon sin, will picture to the mind the curses of the law and the holiness of God, and will whisper: What, one with so black a record as yours should hope for mercy with a holy and jealous God! When the end draws nigh then the devil is up and doing; for he says: Now is my last chance. O what foolishness to put off

conversion for the hour of death! Then it holds hard that the tried Christian triumph.

To that struggle we should look forward and make ready for it. We should avoid sin that Satan be not enabled in our last hour to torment our conscience with grievous transgressions. Above all we should make ourselves intimately acquainted with Jesus Christ and should weapon our souls with His Word. Particularly two words should live in our hearts. The apostle John writes the one, saying: "He is the propitiation for our sins;" and the other the Lord spake unto Martha, saying: "I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die." These two words should be familiar unto us; they should be written in our hearts with living letters that when the Lord asks us as He did Martha: "Believest thou this?" we can rejoicingly answer: Yea, Lord, thou hast the words of eternal life, and I know that thou wilt ransom me from the grave. And if the thought would torment our mind, though we have prepared ever so diligently, yet in the last struggle our strength to keep the faith might fail us, we must again weapon ourselves with the Word that that Lord will be our strength who has promised and said: "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God." Is. 41, 10.

My God, for Jesus' sake I pray

Thy peace may bless my dying day. **AMEN.**

XVII. SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

TEXT : And it came to pass, as he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the sabbath day, that they watched him. And behold, there was a certain man before him which had the dropsy. And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day? And they held their peace. And he took him, and healed him, and let him go; and answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day? And they could not answer him again to these things. And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them, When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honorable man than thou be bidden of him; and he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased: and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. Luke 14, 1-11.

A much agitated subject in our country is the Sunday question. Probably in no other country of the world are the opinions so varied and the contrasts so great in regard to the keeping of Sunday, as in ours. There are the Sabbatarians, who want the Christian Sunday abolished and the Jewish Sabbath re-established. There are the Puritans, who contend that the Christian Sunday is the old Sabbath transferred to the first day of the week. There are the Lutherans, who hold that Sunday shall be kept holy, as devoted solely to the service of God, but insist that it is not of Divine institution. There is, on the other hand, the host of infidels, skeptics and liberalists of every shade and color, who either want the Christian day of rest abolished altogether, or at least want liberty to do on that day what they please. In a country inhabited by so mixed a population as ours, such contrasts can not appear strange,

But in whatsoever country the Christian may dwell, his rule and standard of doctrine and morals is the Bible. A consistent Christian will not be a man who models his faith according to the teachings of men, or who simply imitates the example of those with whom he comes in contact without examining whether it is justified by the Scriptures or not. He will not be carried away by every wind of doctrine, but will ask: What does the written Word of God say? That is to him the supreme guide and by it he abides.

What does the written Word of God tell us in regard to the day of rest? The Old Testament tells us that the Jews were bound to keep the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week; and the New Testament, speaking of our liberty in Christ, tells us: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy-day, or of the new-moon, or of the sabbath-days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." Col. 2, 16. And Rom. 14, 5, St. Paul writes: "One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord: and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it." Therefore our Evangelical Lutheran Church, as the Conservative Church of the Reformation, is conservative also in her teachings concerning Sunday. On the one hand our Church rejects the opinion that the Sabbath was changed from Saturday to Sunday as a tradition of men. We Lutherans are not willing to accept any thing as divine truth for which there is not a clear, distinct and unmistakable Word of God. But the Bible from cover to cover contains no passage saying that God changed the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week, and while the Church has liberty to introduce *churchly* ordinances, it has no authority to *change* the ordinances of God. Hence we keep Sunday as a day which by common consent is set apart for rest and for the worship of God. On the other hand our Evangelical Lutheran Church in a very pronounced manner maintains that those are not Christians

who will not devote the Lord's day to the worship of God and the practice of godliness. Let me therefore to-day speak of

KEEPING THE LORD'S DAY IN A TRULY CHRISTIAN WAY,
as we learn it

- I. From the office unto which Jesus Christ is sent; and
- II. From His example.

I.

The miracles which our Lord Jesus Christ performed in such great number show the object for which He came into the world: to bring deliverance from evil. And the purpose for which these miracles were recorded on the sacred pages St. John declares in the words: "These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." Ch. 20, 31. He is come to be the Helper of the helpless, the Savior of sinners. Therefore in His sojourn on earth He never passed by any one who needed and desired His help. Neither did He ever refuse His help when granting it afforded an opportunity to His enemies to cast reproach upon Him. Our text pictures Him in a company on the Sabbath where it required not a little courage to perform an act of healing, but when He saw this man having the dropsy His compassion went forth to him, "*and he took him, and healed him, and let him go.*" This man had come to that house sick and weak, he departed from it well and strong.

The dropsy is a disease which affects the whole system, and it is a figure of the corruption wrought in us by sin, which Isaiah describes in glowing words saying: "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores." Ch. 1, 5. Do you feel that your soul is sick? Do you realize that you are a sinner? Go to Jesus, the Savior of sinners. Neither need you wait till Sunday comes. He will welcome you any day; for He is come to save you from your sins.

O, a glorious thing that our God has ordained us a Savior with whom we find help in sin's distress, and an excellent thing that we have a weekly recurring day on which to rest from earthly labors and to commune with Him who is the Friend and Savior of the soul! The rest of the soul in Jesus Christ is therefore the most essential thing in keeping the Lord's day. It is the one thing needful without which there can be no truly *Christian* keeping of the day. This necessarily follows from the relation which He sustained to the old Sabbath. What does our text tell us about this?

In it we read: "*And it came to pass, as he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the sabbath day, that they watched him.*" They were watching to see, if He would do that which, according to the traditions of the elders, was a transgression of the Sabbath command. Had they any reason to watch Him in this respect? From their point of view they certainly had. On various occasions Jesus had transgressed, not the Sabbath command itself, but the traditions of the elders which the Pharisees kept so sacredly. The chapter preceding our text narrates that the Lord on the Sabbath healed a woman having a spirit of infirmity, at which the ruler of the synagogue was filled with indignation and said to the people: "There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day." On this occasion likewise came to pass what the Pharisees were watching for. In their presence the Lord healed a man of the dropsy. It is evident that Christ acted as the Lord of the Sabbath, and this He did not only indicate by His acts, on another occasion He directly affirmed it. Passing through a grain-field on the Sabbath His disciples plucked ears of grain and ate, and He defended their action and said: "The Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath." Mark 2, 28. He then spake of Himself not as the Son of God, as which He had sovereign power and authority over all days and times; He spake of Himself as "the Son of man," the second Adam, the Redeemer, the Savior of mankind. *As such* He was Lord of the Sabbath. The meaning is briefly this: the old Jewish day

of rest was a figure of Christ; it pointed forward to Him who would be the everlasting rest of His people. Hence when this One came the figure of the Jewish Sabbath was fulfilled, because He who is the rest of His people had come. As often as the Sabbath recurred the bodily rest of that day was to remind the Israelite of Him who is the rest for the soul. This rest Jesus Christ prepared and He invites us unto it when He says: "Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Matt. 11, 28. This rest is when the soul is at peace with God, resting in this confidence that sin is forgiven for Christ's sake. This resting of the soul in Jesus Christ is the true Christian Sabbath, the antitype of the old Jewish Sabbath, and as the antitype excels the type, "the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things," Heb. 10, 1, so the true Christian Sabbath far excels the Sabbath of the Jews. Their Sabbath brought bodily rest, ours spiritual rest for the soul; they had Sabbath only one day in the week, the true Christian Sabbath is perpetual, lasting seven days in the week, even as Isaiah foretold at the end of his prophecies, writing: "And it shall come to pass, that from one new-moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord." Ch. 66, 23. This worshipping the Lord is the worship in spirit and in truth, when the soul rests in Christ from sin and the fear of wrath, and this is the actual reason, why "*the son of man* is Lord also of the Sabbath," because He brought that which the old Sabbath prefigured, rest for the soul. Remembering that the Son of man brought what the old Sabbath prefigured the Apostolic Church, in selecting a weekly day for public worship, chose the day on which the work of our redemption was completed, as St. Augustine writes: "The apostles and apostolic men consecrated the Lord's day for public worship, because on that day our Redeemer rose again from the dead."

Being the day of Christ's resurrection we should ever wel-

come it as the day of our triumph over all enemies, the day of which we joyously sing:

To-day He rose and left the dead,
And Satan's empire fell ;
To-day His saints His triumphs spread
And all His wonders tell.

Never should we suffer ourselves to be persuaded to keep this day in a servile spirit of legalism. Every one who keeps Sunday, because he thinks that he must do it in order to keep the law, is keeping Sunday in a legal, Jewish, Pharisaic, and not in a Christian spirit. Frequently people think, keeping Sunday strictly will go far in gaining for them the favor of God. Such people keep Sunday in the same sentiment as the Pharisees did the Sabbath. They are yet under the law striving to earn heaven by their own deeds. So we must not keep Sunday. We must not think the keeping of a day would help our souls on to heaven; for though we would keep not one day only, but all seven days in the week for all our lifetime, that could not contribute one whit to the salvation of our souls. How God regards that kind of service when men presume to become worthy of His favor by such external things as the keeping of days He expresses by Isaiah, saying: "The new-moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting." Ch. 1, 13. Though the children of Israel at that time in their outward behavior strictly observed the letter of the Sabbath command, yet the Lord was disgusted with it, because they did it in this mind and sentiment that for their serving Him the Lord owed them His favor and blessing. The children of Israel were bound by the law to keep that certain day, the last day of the week, and to keep it in a certain way, but the spirit, the true inwardness of the Sabbath institution required them on this day to comfort their hearts with the promise of Him who would come to bring the true Sabbath, namely rest for the soul.

We should therefore regard Sunday as being truly *the Lord's day*, that day of the week on which we can lay aside worldly

labors and cares to occupy our heart and mind with Him who is the fulfillment of the old Sabbath, and who has said: "I will give you rest." He and he alone keeps Sunday right who keeps it resting his soul in the Lord Jesus Christ, and one not doing this may otherwise do whatsoever he please, though he read, sing, pray the livelong day, it is all abomination to the Lord. Let me repeat it once more. The old Sabbath was, as Paul expresses it, "a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ." The bodily rest which the Sabbath enjoined, prefigured the rest in Christ, and this is the one thing needful that the heart and the soul rest in Christ; for he that is in Christ is pleasing to God, and what he does is pleasing to God; and he that is not in Christ is not pleasing to God, and what he does is abomination to the Lord. Therefore this alone is keeping Sunday in a truly Christian and God-pleasing manner, if we rest our soul in Christ, who was sent into the world to be our rest. The very day itself teaches this. The Apostolic Church in great wisdom chose the first day after the Sabbath, the day of Christ's resurrection, as the regular day for worship. Sunday therefore is in very deed the Lord's day, the day of His glory, and the day of our peace with God; for He was raised again for our justification.

Awaking on Sunday morning we should invariably turn our thoughts to God, following the example of David who said: "My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee." Ps. 5, 3. But on Sunday morning our thoughts should not turn to Sinai causing us to argue: 'This is that holy day which God commanded with thunder and lightning and an earthquake, threatening death to every one who would do any kind of labor. It must be a holy day unto me lest the anger of God fall on my head, and I must keep it sacred that I may be found His servant keeping His commandment.' That kind of thoughts on Sunday morning are not Lutheran, they are not Evangelical, not Christian; they are legalistic, they are Jewish, and opinions of that sort can beget only a gloomy kind of Sunday keeping. A Lutheran should begin the day with thoughts like these: 'This is the

morning on which my Lord rose again from the dead. He paid the wages of my sins and they laid Him in the sepulchre cold and dead. There He rested on the Sabbath, but in the morning when the light began to shine from the east He burst the bonds of death and rose again, showing that He has truly made atonement for my soul. And now let me put away worldly labors and cares and devote this day to meditate on God's wondrous counsel.' Those are Lutheran and evangelical thoughts on Sunday morning, and they give a very different cast to the keeping of the day than thoughts of the old Sabbath commanded the Israelites at Sinai, thunder bursting over their heads and the earth quaking under their feet. Make it your habit to think of Christ's resurrection on Sunday morning. It gives a cheerful and a joyous character to the day.

This is what we learn from the office of Christ, how to keep Sunday. As He on the Sabbath healed that man having the dropsy and gave him rest from his bodily pains, so He heals our souls from sin and gives them rest from the terrors of death and the torments of hell; and that is keeping Sunday as *the Lord's day*, if we ascribe this honor to Him that He is our rest; if we rest assured of this and with thankful hearts meditate upon it.

II.

From this fact that to rest with heart and soul in Christ is keeping the Lord's day in spirit and in truth, we must not conclude, it would make no difference, what we do externally on this day. If a man says that he keeps the day unto the Lord, but neglects public worship by following his every-day occupation, or spends the day with hunting, fishing, card-playing, or in laziness, or in frivolous company and the like, who will believe that man? "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Matt. 12, 34. The outward behavior will certainly be in keeping with that which lives in the heart. If the Lord is truly the light of the soul, that light will shine forth in the deeds of the hand and the words of the mouth. What our actions and what our conversation is to be on Sunday

we may learn from the example of the Lord. What He did on the Sabbath, we should be eager to do on Sunday.

What did He do on the Sabbath? Our text says: "*He went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath day.*" How came Jesus to go to the house of this chief Pharisee? Very simply in this way: On that Sabbath morning He was at public worship in the synagogue; this man invited Him to dinner and He accepted the invitation. Of this there can be no doubt that He came from public worship; for in his 4th chapter Luke writes of Him: "As his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day." This was the Lord's standing custom. Every Sabbath morning He wended His way to the house of worship. While He sojourned on earth He never neglected public worship. If one wanted to find Him on Sabbath morning, he had to seek Him in the house of worship. How is it with you? What do your neighbors know about you? Do they know, if they want to see you on Sunday morning about the time for public worship, they must go to the church to find you? If your neighbors do not know this, if they have reason to think, although or because it is Sunday morning they would be likely to find you at home, then things are not with you as they ought to be. A Christian ought to be so unfailing a church-goer that everybody in the neighborhood would know it useless to go to his residence about church-time to see him. It was the Lord's invariable custom, to attend public worship, and He says: "Follow me." On Sunday morning the Christian should say with David: "So will I compass thine altar, O Lord; that I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all thy wondrous works. Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honor dwelleth." Ps. 26, 6.

After public worship the Lord went to the house of this chief Pharisee, where there was evidently a large company together. Is that the right way to keep Sunday, after attending worship to have frolics, parties, balls and the like? So the world thinks. It makes the Lord's day a day for frivolity, pleasure-seeking, gluttony and drunkenness. That is serving

the flesh and not the Lord, and from such things the Christian must keep himself unspotted. Neither does the example of the Lord afford a pretense for such gatherings; for He went to that house "*to eat bread,*" and how He behaved there the following part of the text shows. On the other hand we must not think it a sin to cook a meal on Sunday, to invite a guest, or to accept an invitation. It is highly commendable when Christians, coming from public worship, do meet together, are joyous in the Lord and edify one another by godly conversation; for thus the apostle exhorts: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Col. 3, 16. Sunday being set apart by the Church for the Lord's service the very simple rule is to avoid all gatherings where the heart and the mind are drawn away from the Lord, but seek company where you find nourishment for the soul.

In conclusion, let me point out but one thing more which we learn from this text as to the right manner of keeping Sunday. The Lord went to the house of this Pharisee on the Sabbath into a company of lawyers and Pharisees, when He could not be ignorant of the fact that they were His enemies, watching for a chance to harm Him. He knew they hated Him, yet He went there and sought to win them for truth and right. That is an excellent Sunday work, to put away enmity, spite and hate out of the heart, and to gain the erring and sinning for truth and right. It so very easily occurs that quarrels take place during the week; then, if the difficulty is not sooner adjusted, at least on Sunday morning we should remember: This is the Lord's day, the day of the Prince of peace who has commanded: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you," and we should put away all bitterness out of the heart. When on Sunday morning you see the sun rise to give light both to the evil and to the good, remember that you, too, are to forgive your enemy, and you should not appear in the house of God with a heart filled with

rancor and hate. And if it goes hard to overcome the vindictiveness of your own heart, do what the Lord did for those nailing Him to the cross, pray for your enemy. And if during the day you have an occasion, as the case may be, either to remind your enemy of his wrong in a spirit of kindness, or to ask his pardon, or to do him a favor, do it. That, I say, is an excellent Sunday work, because our chief desire in keeping the day is to seek rest from our sins in Christ Jesus, and on every recurring Sunday anew to assure our hearts that He is our peace. But if on Sunday we seek the forgiveness of our sins in Christ, we must also forgive those who have sinned against us; for thus the Lord teaches us to pray: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." Praying the former we must practice the latter; then we have the promise: "Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven." AMEN.

XVIII. SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

TEXT : But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They said unto him, The son of David. He said unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son? And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions. Matt. 22, 34-46.

This text, set apart by the Church for this day, again lays before us the two chief doctrines of the Bible, the Law and the Gospel, teaching us that we are sinners and that Jesus Christ alone is our Savior.

Hearing this some one might perhaps say within himself: 'Forever the same old thing! Why can not the parson at least sometimes preach something new.' I say, some might be apt to think so; for our present generation is very much like the Athenians, of whom St. Luke writes in the 17th chapter of Acts: "All the Athenians and strangers which were there, spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing." New doctrines, new theories, new systems of philosophy were eagerly taken in and discussed by the teachers and students at the various schools of learning which were found at Athens. No one will deny that the same is a characteristic of our age and country. People want something new and whatever is new, or has the name of being new, is much

more attractive and people are inclined to consider it superior for the very reason because it is new. Our generation is full of curiosity, always eager to hear and to tell the newest news.

Now it is by no means to be altogether condemned, if one desires to know what is going on in the world, what changes take place in church and state, what new theories are advanced, what new measures are inaugurated and the like. This is rather commendable, if it proceeds from the right motive and is applied right. God is the supreme ruler of the universe who, as Paul preached to those inquisitive Athenians, "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation." Acts 17, 26. If therefore the Christian desires to know what is transpiring among the nations of the earth in order to observe, how God governs the world, fulfilling His promises and executing His threats agreeably to His Word, that is a kind of curiosity which is right and good. But those actuated by such a motive are not many. Most people want to know or to have the newest only from a morbid curiosity, or to be up with the times, and this kind of hankering after that which is new is very harmful. It is one of the most effectual agencies for the spread of infidelity, anarchism and all manner of fanatical opinions. The Bible is old, the theories and systems of modern scientists are new, and though the principles on which they rest were known and advanced already in old time, yet they are presented in a new dress and are called by new, big, high-sounding names. Therefore the cravers after that which is new will shove the Bible aside like an old-fashioned coat, saying: 'O that is old, very old and out of date, but here is something new, glittering, attractive.' This morbid appetite for that which is new is making sad havoc in the Church. Many want what they are pleased to call up-to-date preaching, that is preaching on any and every thing except the Bible, and many more want the Bible explained after the newest style to suit the times. Some even advocate the opinion that religion and creeds should change with the times.

But the Bible is the unalterable Word of the unalterable God, and I most decidedly hold that it shall not be made to conform to the times and the people, but that the people shall be taught to conform to the Bible. I must of course frequently preach of new things, but new *doctrines* I cannot preach without violating my trust and the promise made at my ordination. I must—if you choose to have it expressed in that way—I must *forever* preach the same old things, Law and Gospel, and God grant you grace never to tire of these things, but *forever* to say in your heart: ‘I am a poor sinner under sentence of condemnation by the law, but Jesus Christ is my Savior, and He is the same yesterday, to-day and forever.’

We are called Old Lutherans, although we do not want to be either Old or New Lutherans. We simply want to teach, believe and practice what Luther, by the grace of God, taught in agreement with the unalterable Word of God. But we have been nicknamed Old Lutherans, and since we must bear the name, let us wear it with a good grace, and let us see that we are in deed and in truth of the old, old faith, immovably holding to the *old* Word of the *old* God, as Luther himself never tired of teaching Law and Gospel, but every day applied himself to study the ten commandments and the Creed. Let me therefore to-day speak on the old question:

“WHICH IS THE GREAT COMMANDMENT IN THE LAW?”

Permit me to set forth

- I. Which is the great commandment;
- II. Why love is the great commandment; and
- III. How it is fulfilled.

I.

When once the Lord had answered a question of the Sadducees concerning the resurrection of the dead in such a masterly manner that they were utterly silenced, some of the Pharisees concluded to put a question to Jesus which they thought He could not answer, or which He could not answer without causing a division among the people. When they had chosen their question one of them came to Jesus and said: “*Master,*

which is the great commandment in the law?” Certainly an important question, not belonging to that class of questions against which Paul warns Timothy, writing: “Charge some that they teach no other doctrine, neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith.” 1 Tim. 1, 3. On questions on which nothing depends there should be no disputing in the church, but this lawyer hit on a question of great consequence. It is not the greatest of questions; for the question: “*What think ye of Christ?*” is greater; but it is a question which must contribute greatly to the knowledge and right understanding of the law. It was a question on which those Pharisees were most likely not agreed among themselves, some answering it one way, some another, and they probably thought it a question which no man could answer in such a way as to command universal assent.

But this Pharisee came to Him who was the author of the law, who understood it perfectly in all its bearings, and hence he received an answer which could not be disputed; for Jesus said: “*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*”

The Lord here makes a division of the law, comprising the whole of it under two heads, even as the commandments were originally written on two tables or stone slabs. These two tables of stone were prepared by God Himself, but when Moses had broken them in his anger over the idolatry of the people, he was commanded to make other slates similar to the first, and on these God again wrote the “ten words” with His finger. How many commandments were written on each table the Bible does not say. Painters generally put three commandments on one table and seven on the other, but whether they were so divided we do not know. Even so we do not know which commandments were together on the same table, we only know that there were ten commandments in all and these were written on two tables of stone.

The division of the commandments which we have in our Catechism and by which we count three commandments to the first and seven to the second table was in vogue in the church before Luther's time. It is based on the division which the Lord Himself indicates in this text. Christ here brings all the commandments under these two heads: love to God and love to the neighbor. Therefore we take those commandments which treat directly of the love and worship of God for the first, and those which treat of love to our neighbor for the second table. This is the reason why the first table is so much the shorter, comprising only three commandments, because only these three treat immediately of the love and worship of God.

From this text we also learn in what relation the two tables of the law stand to each other. Of the commandment enjoining love to God, the Lord says: "*This is the first and great commandment,*" and of that enjoining love to the neighbor: "*And the second is like unto it.*" He does not call the second great, neither does He say that it is equal unto the first. The brook is like unto the river, but not equal to it; the maid is like unto the queen, but inferior to her. Speaking of the second table alone we may properly say that love to the neighbor is the great commandment of the second table, but love to God is the great commandment of the whole law. The command: "*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God*" is greater than the command: "*Thou shalt love thy neighbor.*" Because God is greater than the neighbor, love to God must be greater than love to the neighbor. The command to love the Author of the law must, in the very nature of things, be greater than the command to love those who are equally under the law with us.

Being the great commandment of the whole law the first is the fountain from which the second flows. We are to love our neighbor because we love God. If a man loves his neighbor, but not from the love of God, he does it not from the right motive, and it is not the right kind of love. The apostle John, 1 Ep. 4, 21, writes: "This commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God, love his brother also." From the love

of God is to flow forth love to our neighbor. If we love our neighbor because we love God, then it is right according to the law.

From this relation of the two tables to each other it furthermore necessarily follows that a violation of the first table is a greater sin than the transgression of the second. Of course among men upon earth much more stress is laid on the second table than on the first. Excepting perjury, our federal government does not deal at all with the first table of the moral law, and even perjury is punished by the federal government, only because it is a vicious thing among men, and not because it is a sin against God. Where church and state are separated, as they ought to be everywhere, the civil government has to deal only with such things which belong into the second table of the moral law. The civil government will not punish idolatry, but it punishes theft. Kneeling before an idol is not a crime before the civil court, while stealing a dime is. But, considering the ten commandments as God's law, it is easy to see, that the violations of the first table constitute a greater sin than the transgressions of the second. Blasphemy is a greater sin than slander. Deliberately corrupting the Word of God by human traditions brings greater guilt on the soul, than stealing a man's money. The man who is very punctilious in politeness towards men and is irreverent towards God belongs into the category of those who strain at gnats and swallow camels. If you always pay your neighbor, but never pay your debts toward God, you are doing the smaller and neglecting the greater. If you have done right towards men, do not therefore flatter yourself that you have kept the law. The main thing is to do right towards God.

From this relation of the two tables this too necessarily follows that the second must yield to the first, whenever they come in conflict. The first commandment enjoins me to worship God alone; the fourth commandment enjoins me to obey the government. Now if the government commands me to worship a false god, then I must keep the first, and must set aside the fourth commandment by refusing to obey the government.

Those three Jews at Babylon were commanded by Nebuchadnezzar, their lawful sovereign, to worship the image which he had made. The first commandment of Jehovah's law forbade this. Hence they were so situated that they must either break a command of the first, or must set aside a command of the second table. They kept the former and set aside the latter by refusing to obey their lawful government, and so those men kept the law of God, because the second table is subordinate to the first, and they committed no sin in disobeying the king. If they had done the contrary, if they had argued: God has indeed forbidden the worship of images, but He has commanded us to obey the government and this we will do, then they would have placed a command of the second table *above* a command of the first, and by thus inverting the relation of the two tables, they would have violated the law most flagrantly. The first table is the greater; therefore we must account it the first and greatest, and must obey it first.

II.

Why is love the great commandment in the law? Why is it that love to God is the great commandment of the whole law, and love to the neighbor the great commandment of the second table? The shortest and simplest answer is, because the Lord says it. In answer to the question of that lawyer He said: "*Love is the first and great commandment.*" Christ says it, and that must end all dispute among Christians.

Yet we may ask: How is it that love is the great commandment? The answer to this Christ gives when He says: "*On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*" Whatever of law and commandments is contained in the books of Moses and the prophets all hinges on love. St. Paul asserts the same in short and sharp words, when he writes: "Love is the fulfilling of the law." Rom. 13, 10. All commandments of the law are comprehended in the command of love, and therefore he that is perfect in love has fulfilled the law.

Love is far more than merely the practicing of a particular virtue or good work, as to pray, to give alms, to live chaste.

Love is an affection of the heart which comes into play in all man's words and works. The law does require works; it requires a vast variety of outward works which can only be performed by an activity of the bodily members; but the first and great requirement of the law is the love of the heart. The law requires me to go and do that work, but it wants me to do it from love and in love. Now if I go and do the work, but I do it without love, then my keeping the law is like unto a hollow tree, there is no heart in it. To do the work without love is keeping the letter without the spirit of the law. Human laws are complied with by the mere act. If a citizen hands over the amount at which the law taxes him the collector is satisfied, and it is all the same to him, whether it is given willingly or grudgingly. But with the law of God it is not so. God looks on the heart, and if a work is not done in love it is not lawful before Him.

Let me attempt to illustrate this. The law commands us to help those in need, which requires an act. If now a starving beggar is placed before you, you may act in four different ways. You may treat him like the priest and Levite did the man who fell among thieves, pass him by. Then you are violating both the letter and the spirit of the law. Or you may extend him a gift wishing in your heart that you had not met him. Then you are keeping the letter and violating the spirit of the law. Or you may be prompted to say: He is my fellow man, redeemed by the blood of my Lord Jesus Christ; surely I must aid him. Then you are keeping both the letter and the spirit of the law. Or you may, prompted by the love of Jesus, heartily sympathize with him, deploring it that you have neither silver nor gold to give him. Then you are actuated by the spirit of the law, and God accepts it as though you had kept the letter also.

We may therefore liken the law to man having soul and body. The body is composed of many and manifold members, the soul is one, but it goes through all the members and gives life and activity to every one of them. Now when the soul is out of the body the corpse still looks like a man, but it is dead, there is no life in it, and instead of being delighted with a corpse you are shy of it. The law comprises many commandments which re-

quire a vast variety of works, but love is the soul of the law. Love must go through all those works, and if a man's works are done in love they are live works and are pleasing to God, but if a man's works are done without love, they have the form of good works, but there is no life in them, they are dead works and God is shy of them, as you are shy of a corpse. It is love which gives a man's works their value before God.

Mark well, therefore, that the Lord does not say, love is the greatest commandment, He says: "*Love is the great commandment.*" That expresses much more than if He had said the greatest. Before God there is only one great commandment, the command of love. It is love which makes the works of the law great, and without love not one of them is great. The greatest works without love are all nothing before God.

III.

What shall I say now as to the fulfilling of the law? What has been said, as I hope, is simple enough for the simplest to understand that to keep the law, keep it perfectly, we must be able to say that we are, and ever have been, perfect in love. The first commandment requires that all our affections are turned to God and that all our thoughts, words and deeds flow from the love of God. The second requires that my neighbor is to be as dear to me as I am to myself, and that I am to be concerned in his welfare just as much as in my own. To be perfect in love never an evil inclination, never a mistrust towards God, never an ill-will towards any man must have been born in us. Weighed in the balance according to our love toward God and man we must be found wanting, and how could we hope to be justified by our love before the God of love? Where is the man on earth who has advanced so far in keeping the law as to be fitted for that realm, where love rules supreme, where all the inhabitants are perfect in love? Will a love full of flaws and defects entitle us to admittance at the gates of the new Jerusalem? "There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth." Rev. 21, 27. We must have a fulfillment of the command of love, a perfect fulfillment, or we can never hope to

dwell with God in one tabernacle. Where shall we obtain such a fulfillment.

"What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?" He is the Son of God and of David, "true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary." Being God He is love, as it is written: "God is love." 1 John 4, 16. This essential divine love He has for Himself alone and no creature can partake of it, but prompted by His own love David's Lord became David's Son to take our place and to fulfill the command of love for us. As the second Adam, the second representative of our race, He was "made under the law," Gal. 4, 4, to fulfill it in our stead. He loved God His Father, and He loved Him with a perfect love. By the mouth of His father David He declared: "Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me. I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart." Ps. 40, 7. In the night in which He was betrayed He said to the disciples: "That the world may know that I love the Father: and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence." John 14, 31. He loved His Father and at His bidding He gladly went into death. Of His love to us St. John writes: "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end." Ch. 13, 1. In the night of His greatest trial He said: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." John 15, 13. But Christ died for us while we were yet sinners; so He was verily perfect in love towards His brethren of mankind. He walked in love unblamable in the sight of the all-seeing eyes of His Father. He had come into the world to fulfill the command of love for us, and when He bowed His head on the cross He said: "It is finished."

For what did He who is David's Son and David's Lord want a fulfillment of the law of love? Was He Himself in need of it? He was essentially love and was in need of nothing. But we were in need of it, and for us He kept the command of love. If we are not apt to doubt that Jesus Christ was perfect in love, let us be the more diligent to hold fast the two little words "for us." For this purpose was He made under the law that the

righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us. If we claim His perfection in love and bring it before the Father, saying: I was born in sins and have not kept Thy command of love, but Thy Son Jesus Christ, my Lord, has kept it for me, then we have a fulfillment of the law of love, a perfect fulfillment, and the gates of the New Jerusalem cannot be closed against us. Wrapping our souls in the mantle of our Substitute let us sing with Luther in the last stanza of his hymn on the ten commandments:

Help us, Lord Jesus Christ, for we
A Mediator have in Thee ;
Without Thy help our works are vain,
And merit only endless pain. AMEN.

XIX. SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

TEXT : And he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city. And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed : and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer ; thy sins be forgiven thee. And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts ? For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee ; or to say, Arise, and walk ? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house. But when the multitude saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men. Matt. 9, 1-8.

The greatest and most precious treasure which a man can possess on earth is the forgiveness of sins, and the most valuable education, the most indispensable of all knowledge and all science is to know, how to become rid of sin and to obtain forgiveness before God. What are all honors, pleasures and treasures of this world in comparison to the forgiveness of sin ? “ What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul,” having not the forgiveness of sin ? Let a man be ruler over the whole face of the earth, let him possess a thousand palaces in which are found all the luxuries of land and sea, let him be worshiped as a god, if he have not the forgiveness of sin he is a poor, forlorn, miserable creature. God is his enemy, the wrath of the Eternal abides upon him, the angels are disgusted with him, the devils have possession of his soul, in his own bosom there is a witness against him, and when his appointed time of life is past there is nothing more in store for him save only the reaping of wrath on the day of wrath.

Tradition has it that Alexander the Great, who in a period of ten years conquered Asia, ordered that his right hand be left hanging out of his coffin to show that he had departed from the earth empty-handed. “ So is he that layeth up treasure for

himself, and is not rich toward God ; " Luke 12, 21 ; he must at last go hence empty-handed. But rich, rich in time, rich in eternity, rich above measure is every one who possesses the forgiveness of sins. God is his friend, Jesus' blood and righteousness his beauty ; the angels are his companions, and though while sojourning in the flesh he can not be spared times of temptation when Satan seeks to sift him, yet he has peace with God, and, upon the whole, a quiet and peaceable life ; and when he comes to die he does not go hence empty-handed, he takes the forgiveness of sins with him, and having the forgiveness of sins he goes to dwell with those who have no sin. " Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity." Ps. 32, 1. Offer me gold, offer me flatteries, offer me honors, I will not trade for them the forgiveness of my sins.

Therefore the best wisdom, the most valuable knowledge, the science chosen above all sciences, is to know, how to obtain and how to possess this treasure of treasures, the forgiveness of sins. What is the wisdom of Solomon, the knowledge of Aristotle, the learning of Plato ? Suppose a man be versed in all sciences and skilled in all arts ; suppose he knew all the secrets of nature ; suppose he find out ways and means to dredge the ocean from pole to pole, and to gather its treasures, what at the last is he benefited by all his knowledge, if he know not how to obtain the forgiveness of sins before God ? And suppose a man would remain ignorant of all worldly learning as a new-born babe, but he would learn this wisdom and would master this art, how to obtain forgiveness of sins before God, would he not still excel in knowledge the sages of the ages ? Yes indeed, to understand this art, how to obtain and possess the forgiveness of sins, passes all wisdom and all knowledge.

Is there a way for sinners to obtain forgiveness of sins ? Is there such a way ? and is it a sure way, a safe way, an infallible way ? a way which can not mislead or deceive ? In this thing I am not willing to risk my soul in any uncertain way. What prudent man would resort to experimenting in such a momentous matter on which depends the life of the soul. When it

comes to the question, how, in what way and by what means shall I obtain the forgiveness of my sins? then I am not willing to trust any thing which is subject to uncertainty; then I want a way which is more certain than eyesight and feeling, a way in which I am positively, infallibly, unmistakably certain that I do obtain the forgiveness of sins. Is there such a way? Thanks be to God, there is. This way is described in the Gospel for to-day. Let us accordingly consider:

THE POWER TO FORGIVE SINS GIVEN UNTO MEN ON EARTH.

I would set forth:

- I. That this power is indeed given unto men on earth; and
- II. Why it is, or how it comes that sinners can forgive sins.

I.

The chief subject of this Gospel is the forgiveness of sin, and a particular point in the doctrine of the forgiveness of sin is made most prominent by the people, when they praise God, because this power, to forgive sins, is given unto men on earth. This point let us take into special consideration.

Returning from a journey to the country east of the sea of Galilee Jesus "*came into his own city,*" that is into Capernaum, which city He had chosen for His home during His public ministrations. When it became known that He was in a certain house a multitude of people gathered and He preached to them. While He was preaching four men brought one on a bed who was sick of the palsy, and when they could not get in at the door they uncovered the roof and let down the sick man to the feet of Jesus. The palsy is often brought on by intemperate indulgence. It is often the reward of immorality, gluttony and drunkenness. Palsy belongs to those diseases which men often bring on themselves by their own viciousness. Though the text does not say it directly, yet it would seem from the tendency of the whole narrative, that this man had brought on this sickness by his own wickedness, but now he had a penitent heart and was filled with remorse for his sins, otherwise Jesus would not have spoken to him as He did. This man had been told of Jesus and

he said within himself, he must come to Jesus, he must find healing, and so determined were both the sick man and his carriers that they let him down through the roof with ropes.

When Jesus saw their faith, saw the confidence which both the sick man and his friends had, and when He saw what this sick man needed most and perhaps desired most, He said unto him: "*Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.*" Some scribes and Pharisees, who were sitting by, correctly understood the words of Jesus as meaning that He Himself forgave the sins of this sick man and they "*said within themselves, This man blasphemeth.*" They argued that God alone could forgive sins, and they counted it a blasphemous thing for a man to pretend to have power to forgive sins. But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said unto them:

"*Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? for whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk?*" The Lord conceded that the scribes had understood Him right, and He offered to prove by a miracle that He had power to forgive sins, and He did prove it; for the text continues: "*But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house,*" and the man did so. It was not so much the miraculous cure of this palsy stricken man which excited the astonishment of the multitude, they were rather amazed, because by this miracle Jesus gave undeniable proof that He had power to forgive sins, and when they "*glorified God, which had given such power unto men,*" they meant the power to forgive sins.

Here is this remarkable circumstance that those people were in error, and yet they spoke the truth. They regarded Jesus merely a man, and that was an error, because He is the true God; but when they say that God had given the power to forgive sins unto men they spake the truth: for this power God has indeed given unto men on earth.

In the first place, this power is given unto Jesus Christ; for He says: "*But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins.*" Mark well that He is here

speaking of Himself not as the Son of God, but as "*the Son of man.*" In His Divine nature, as the Son of God, this power was never *given* Him; from eternity He possessed it in Himself; but according to His human nature, as the Son of man, this power is given Him; for here He very distinctly declares that "*the Son of man*" possesses this power, and this He establishes by a miracle.

This power to forgive sins Christ did not keep to Himself alone, He communicated it unto others. Those people "*glorified God which had given such power unto men.*" They do not say: Unto this man, they use the plural: "*Unto men.*" Now if it were not true that the power to forgive sins is given to men, then the Lord must have corrected those people, otherwise by His silence He would have connived at a falsehood. By His silence He sanctioned what they said: the power to forgive sins is given unto men. You know thereafter the Lord in due form instituted the office of the keys and therein conferred on men the power to forgive sins; for thus He said unto Peter: "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven."

Matt. 16, 19. And thereafter He said unto all the disciples: "Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven." Mat. 18, 18. Likewise after His resurrection He said unto His disciples: "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you," and breathing on them and giving them the Holy Ghost He said: "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them." John 20, 23. There can be no question about it, it is even so as the people in our text say, the power to forgive sins is given unto men upon earth.

This is verily something great, something passing strange. What! one man who is himself a sinner should have the power to forgive the sins of another man, and so to forgive them that they are truly forgiven before God in heaven! Here is Jesus of Nazareth, a man in fashion like other men, telling another that his sins are forgiven, and because He found no faith with those present, He proved that He had the power to forgive sins

by curing an incurable disease with a single word. Must not those people have stood with mouths gaping and eyes staring? Unto this day, notwithstanding that the Gospel has been preached for so many centuries, many, when it is said that power is given unto men upon earth to forgive sins, are ready to ask with those Pharisees: "Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?" But by offering this objection people only give evidence upon themselves that they have not yet learned rightly to understand the work and Gospel of Jesus Christ; for if a man rightly understands the work and the institutions of Christ it will no more appear strange unto him, it will no more sound to him like an incredible thing that sinful men impart the forgiveness of sin. Let us therefore examine, *why it is, or how it comes that men on earth have the power to forgive sins.*

II.

The power to forgive sins is not of man. Those people "GLORIFIED GOD, WHICH HAD GIVEN SUCH POWER UNTO MEN." Of himself no man has power to forgive sins. Of Himself God alone can forgive sins. Of himself man has no power at all in spiritual things. "Without me," says the Lord, "ye can do nothing." John 15, 5. The power to forgive sins is of God given unto men. That is a very simple truth, easy to understand, if illustrated by a comparison from worldly matters. Of himself a store clerk has no right or power to sell even a stick of candy, but by the authority given him of his principal he has power to sell everything in the store. This power to forgive sins is not of man, it is given unto men of God.

But how does it come that there is forgiveness of sin? How is it that sin can be forgiven at all? Of the source, whence the forgiveness of sin springs, we are reminded when the Lord here calls Himself "*the Son of man.*" "*The Son of man*" forgives the sins of that man sick of the palsy. What does it mean, when He is called "*the Son of man*"? It means that He is the Woman's Seed, the promised Redeemer, the second Adam, who, sacrificing Himself for sin, redeemed man from the guilt

and punishment of sin, and so earned forgiveness for all sins of all men. Here is the starting point, the original source of all forgiveness. If it were not for the work of "the Son of man" there would be no forgiveness of sin at all, neither with men nor with God, neither on earth nor in heaven. But Jesus Christ did suffer and rise again, and He won abundant forgiveness. He has earned it, it belongs to Him and it is for Him to say, what shall be done with it and how it shall be distributed.

Where now is this forgiveness of sin? Where is it stored? where to be found? Should Jesus Christ after earning it on earth with hard and bloody labor have taken it away from the earth up to heaven? Why, what purpose should or could it answer in heaven? There no kind of forgiveness is necessary; for in heaven there is no sin, nothing which needs to be forgiven. Or should Christ have taken the forgiveness of sin up to heaven to store it away there that it might, so to say, be parceled out to those who would reach the hand of faith up to heaven to get it there? This is the idea of Enthusiasts who regard the Gospel nothing but an empty proclamation and not the Word and Carrier of pardon, and who would make the sacraments mere signs and symbols, instead of means and vessels in which the merits of Christ are conveyed and offered, but it is an idea which robs Christ of His glory. Should Christ, after laboring so hard on earth to earn forgiveness for men, have carried that forgiveness away so far from the earth? Should He have stored it up in such a manner as to be difficult to procure? O no, surely not. He is too much the Friend of sinners to make that kind of an arrangement. On the earth He earned forgiveness for men upon earth; on earth it is necessary; from the earth He did not take it away; on earth He left it, as He said unto the disciples: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you." John 14, 27. Where He left His peace, there He left the forgiveness of sins; for these two can not be separated. He left the forgiveness of sin with sinners on earth that it might be near and handy for those desiring and seeking it.

In what is the forgiveness of sin vested and how is it communicated to men? It is comprised in the means of grace which

the Lord has instituted, and in and through them it is imparted to men. "*Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.*" By this word the Lord communicated or conveyed the forgiveness to that man even as He communicated bodily health to him by this word. "*Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.*" By the Word of the Lord the forgiveness of sin is conveyed. In short and sharp words does the Lord express this in the 15th chapter of John, saying to the disciples: "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." The word spoken was the medium through which they were cleansed. Very plainly does St. Paul speak of this, Romans 10, writing: "Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above.)" Paul was not a friend of the doctrine that we must ascend up to heaven by faith there to grasp Christ with His merits and to bring Him down to us; Paul says: Say not so. Paul proceeds: "Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.)" Paul did not preach that Christ is now in the other world and we must stretch out the hand of faith into that other world to draw Christ unto us; Paul says: Say not so. And what does Paul teach? "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart; that is the word of faith, which we preach: that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." St. Paul's doctrine is this: Look not up to heaven, look not beyond the grave, seek not in the distance, the Word of faith is nigh thee; that Word believe and thou shalt be saved. Because receiving the Word in faith saves, it of necessity follows that the Word comprises and brings all that is necessary unto salvation, otherwise receiving it in faith could not save. Christ with all His merits, including the forgiveness of sins, is comprised in the means of grace; they are His storehouse, and they are given unto the Church; not the Church in heaven; the Church in heaven has no more any use for the office of the keys; they are given unto the Church on earth. And the Church appoints stewards publicly to minister in the Word and Sacraments and to divide out the treasures of

this storehouse. This is the reason why men have power upon earth to forgive sins, because the means of grace, the storehouse in which the treasure of forgiveness is laid down, are given unto men. Now he who has the storehouse can also divide out. O a glorious thing! This storehouse is near. It can even be carried from house to house over the face of the earth. Missionaries are even now opening it in the very heart of Africa. He that brings the word of pardon brings the pardon itself.

How then do preachers in pronouncing absolution forgive sins? They forgive sins similarly, I say not exactly so, but similarly, as a quartermaster divides rations to an army. Who purchased those rations? Not the quartermaster, but the government. Who put them into the storehouse? The government had them shipped there. Whose property are they? Not the quartermaster's, but the government's. But who divides them out? Certainly the quartermaster who is appointed by the government for that purpose. A soldier may, in the absence of a quartermaster, obtain rations by going directly to the storehouse; many do find the forgiveness of sins by the reading of the Word without a preacher; yet the ordinary way is that a soldier obtains his rations from the quartermaster. Now suppose in the late war between the States a soldier would have said: I know that quartermaster; he is just as poor a fellow as I am, and how should he be able to give me rations; I must get my rations from the government; and the man would run all the way from the field to the capital to get his rations from the government, would not that man have made himself the laughing-stock of the whole regiment? And would not the authorities at the capital have sent him back telling him: We have established our storehouse in the field; there you get your rations? So, in fact, all those people do who say: O, preachers could not forgive sins, the Word were nothing but a letter or sound, and it was not reasonable that baptism could work forgiveness of sins, they must get forgiveness from God. They pass by the storehouse which the King has established, saying, they must get their rations from the King. I tell you, the King will send them

back, saying: I have established my storehouse and have appointed my stewards; there you get your rations.

Here is the way to obtain the forgiveness of sins: Hear the Word, be baptized, receive absolution, come to the Lord's Supper. It is the way of faith. You must believe that these things bring you righteousness and life; but it is a safe way, a sure way, an infallible way; a way in which you cannot be deceived. Grasp the words of absolution and you have the pardon which they proclaim. That can not fail. If the words of absolution were the preacher's own words, spoken in his own name and by his own authority, then they would amount to nothing, but

{ The words which absolution give
Are his who died that we might live;
The minister whom Christ has sent
Is but His humble instrument.

However great our sin may be,
The absolution sets us free,
Appointed by God's own dear Son
To bring the pardon He has won. AMEN.

XX. SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

TEXT: And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding : and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner : my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready : come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise : and the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth : and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good : and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment : and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment ? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness ; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen. *Matt. 22, 1-14.*

The text before us contains a well-known parable, the main features of which are very plain and simple. This king making a marriage for his son is God the Father, who prepared a marriage for His only begotten Son Jesus Christ. The guests bidden beforehand were the Jews; the servants sent to invite them were the prophets down to John the Baptist. When it is said of these guests: "*And they would not come,*" the meaning is not that none at all came; for throughout the whole history of Israel at all times some did come to this marriage, namely, all those souls that set their hope of salvation not upon the works of the law, but upon the promised Bridegroom of Israel. Even at the time of Elijah, when it appeared as though not even a remnant had been left unto the Lord, there were still seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed their knees unto Baal, but were looking and waiting for this marriage. Yet those who

with heart and soul did come were so few in number, so small a remnant in comparison to the whole people, that it could truly be said of the multitude of those bidden: "*And they would not come.*"

Thereafter, when the table was spread, God sent forth other servants, the twelve apostles, the seventy-two disciples and many others, commissioning them to proclaim to the children of Abraham after the flesh: "*Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage.*" But the Jews of that age were even a more stiff-necked and back-sliding people than ever before. The great majority of the people had their minds absorbed in the tilling of their farms and the handling of their merchandise, and they paid no attention whatever to the invitation or made light of it. Moreover, the rulers and those who were counted the flower of the nation, incensed at the invitation, began to persecute the servants, to slay them and to seek to extirpate them from the face of the earth. When the cry of this unworthy treatment of His invitation came before the King, He called His armies, the Romans, and they came into the Holy Land, laid it waste, burned up Jerusalem and sowed salt over the place.

But this marriage was not to remain without guests, the house was to be filled. So the King sent His servants out into the highways towards the four points of the compass, commanding them to invite whomsoever they would meet, and they "*gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests.*" At this day the greatest and mightiest nations of the earth are guests at this marriage, being called after the name of Christ. But in this vast multitude of guests there are many who are not pleasing to the King. Looking over the guests the King sees one by whose presence the feast is disgraced, and He causes him to be bound hand and foot, and to be cast forth out of the marriage hall. This one is not a single individual only, he represents a large class of those sitting as guests at this marriage. "They are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they

are of the seed of Abraham, are they all children." Rom. 9, 6. They are not all Christians who are called Christians, neither are all Christians who pretend to be Christians. The visible Church is like unto a heap of unfanned wheat whereof the greater part is chaff which will be swept away into unquenchable fire when the storm of judgment will strike it. All those who are called Christians and pretend to be Christians are guests at this marriage, but whether they will remain in the marriage hall, or will be cast forth out of it is not decided by the name they bear or the pretense they put forth, but according to this very simple rule, whether or not their soul is dressed in the proper wedding garment.

Being guests at this marriage, we must see that we be not like unto this man who was cast out of the marriage hall. And why was he not pleasing to the King? Because he had not on the wedding garment. On this all depends. We must be dressed in the right wedding garment. Hence let me speak of

THE WEDDING GARMENT WORN AT THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB,
SHOWING

- I. What that wedding garment is, and
- II. How indispensably necessary it is.

I.

From our text we learn that, at the marriage of the King's Son, all depends on the garment worn by the guests; for the Lord says: "*When the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment?*" The other guests had on wedding garments, and therefore were pleasing to the King; but this man had no wedding garment, and therefore he was obnoxious to the King. On this one single thing hangs the pleasure or the displeasure of the King. Whether or not we shall be found worthy to sit at the marriage feast of the Lamb, depends on this, whether we have on the wedding garment or not. All-important, therefore, is the question: What is this garment? What material is it made of? what is its color? who has made this garment? where

is it stored, and how is it obtained? how is it put on and worn? Because all depends on the wearing of this garment it is a matter of the greatest consequence for us to know all about it, or, at least, to learn as much about it as possible.

Now I can not tell the half about this garment in one sermon, neither do I profess to know all about it. By the grace of God I do know a little about this garment, just enough to make me desirous to know more. I hope it is so with you too. My sincere wish is that there be none among you who is not concerned about this garment, none who cares nothing for that dress in which alone he will be found worthy to stand before the Son of man. My heart's prayer is that every one of you may be wearing this garment, that on the judgment day my eyes may not behold one soul among you bound hand and foot and cast into outer darkness. O what a glorious thing it would be, if I could say unto the Lord: 'Here are those who were entrusted to my care, and none of them is lost.' God grant that not even one child of perdition may be found among us.

But to say a little about this garment let me ask: By whom was it made? what factory is it from? You are aware that this marriage is not an earthly, but a heavenly feast; therefore the garments which the guests wear can not be earthly, they must be heavenly garments. This wedding garment is not of earthly, it is of heavenly make. Every one appearing at this marriage in a garment of earthly and human make will be found without a wedding garment: for this garment no man on earth can make. Millions have tried and do try to make for themselves a dress fit in which to appear before God without needing to be ashamed, but it is all labor lost; for "we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." Is. 64, 6. Adam was the first who tried to make for himself a garment with which to hide his shame. When Adam and Eve had fallen their eyes were opened, and seeing that they were naked they sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves aprons. Yet when they heard God in the garden they sought to hide from Him, and Adam excused his hiding by saying: "I heard thy voice in the garden: and I was afraid, because I was naked."

Gen. 3, 10. The apron which he had made for himself helped him nothing; it did not cover his shame before God. It will never do to appear before the King in a garment of our own make. Human fabrics are too thin and the eyes of the King are too sharp.

But after God had promised Adam the Woman's Seed, then we read: "Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them." Gen. 3, 21. Without putting His own hand to the task God might have instructed them, how to make clothes for themselves, but God Himself made the first clothes for them, and this He did in token of what He would do through the promised Deliverer, that in Him He would prepare a garment in which man could again appear before God without needing to be ashamed. That is the wedding garment of which the Lord is here speaking. God Himself prepared this wedding garment, having it made by His own Son. Because God prepared this garment it is finished completely, for God does not leave His works half done. Not a stitch remains to be sewed on this garment, or rather it is not sewed at all. Like the coat which Christ wore, it is "without seam, woven from the top throughout." John 19, 23. That the garment is finished complete is very evident from our parable; for by the inviting servants He declared: "*Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready.*"

As this garment is not of earthly make, neither is it composed of earthly material. What it is made of, or what it is the Scripture tell us in manifold ways. In the 16th chapter of Ezekiel the King says unto Israel concerning this garment: "When I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness. I clothed thee with broidered work, and shod thee with badgers' skin, and I girded thee about with fine linen, and I covered thee with silk. I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put a jewel on thy forehead, and a beautiful crown upon thine head. Thus wast thou decked with gold and silver; and thy raiment was of fine linen, and silk, and broidered work." In the 61st chapter

of Isaiah the Church exclaims: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels." In the 19th chapter of Revelations we read: "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." So then this garment consists in righteousness, yet not such righteousness with which we may clothe ourselves by our own efforts, but such righteousness with which God clothes us; for thus St. Paul writes: "Not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith;" Phil. 3, 9; and Eph. 5, 25: "Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." Christ dresses the whole Church, every believing soul, in His own garments and makes it like unto Himself. Now of Him the Bride says in the Song of Solomon 5, 10: "My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand." The wedding garment is red and white: red with the blood of Christ, white with innocence and holiness, and, strange to say, it is white, because it was made red; for of those standing before God, "arrayed in white robes," one of the elders said unto John: "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Rev. 7, 14. This garment is washed in the blood of Christ and thereby made white. You know this garment is Jesus' blood and righteousness which cleanses from all sin and covers all unrighteousness, and this garment the guests do not furnish, the King furnishes it. Those clothed with this garment appear at the marriage not in their own, but in the King's dress; for Jesus' blood and

righteousness are God's own blood and righteousness; "for God hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." 2 Cor. 5, 21. Christ's merits, His obedience, His atonement for sin, grace and forgiveness in Him, this is the garment which God has prepared; for "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." 2 Cor. 5, 19.

Those wearing this garment are all dressed alike. It is one and the same with them all, and it covers and hides every thing which is of themselves. The guests brought together were "*bad and good*," moral and immoral; some ragged and filthy, some in genteel dress; but in the wedding garment they are all alike and no difference, as Paul writes: "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." Gal. 3, 27. Rightly does the poet sing of this garment:

This spotless robe the same appears
When ruined nature sinks in years;
No age can change its glorious hue,
The robe of Christ is ever new.

How the guests come to the wedding and are dressed in the wedding garment the Lord also plainly tells us, saying: "*As many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. And those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good.*" The Lord does not say that they came of their own free will and choice; of themselves they never would have come; but the Word of invitation came to them by the servants, and that Word attracted, drew, persuaded them, and so they were brought together, not by force, but persuaded by the Word of invitation. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Rom. 10, 17. This Word you must hear, consider, meditate, and it will make this marriage something more precious to your soul than the tilling of your fields, or the handling of your merchandise. This Word will persuade you to dress in this wedding garment and ever more closely to wrap up your soul in it.

II.

And that no one may think, he might do without this wedding garment, let us hear, *how indispensably necessary it is.* This is clear from various circumstances in the text. Of the servants sent out into the highways the Lord distinctly says that they "*gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good.*" On the highways the servants found all kinds of people; some very good, some very bad; some virtuous, some vicious in the sight of men. But the servants did not make such a distinction as to invite the good and to pass by the bad; they indiscriminately invited all, whomsoever they found; for the good were not so good that they would not have needed this garment, and the bad were not so bad that the wedding garment could not have made them pleasing to the King. It made no difference what those people had been before, if the King only found them adorned with the wedding garment.

"*And the wedding was furnished with guests.*" The servants gathered a vast multitude coming to sit as guests at this marriage, but among them were many who came for reasons other than the appreciation of this marriage. Many came without putting on the wedding garment; for "*when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*" This man was sitting at the table among the guests and some one looking over the hall might perhaps have taken him for the chiefest of all the guests; hypocrites frequently make a better appearance before men, than upright Christians; but though he may have behaved never so piously, he did not wear the wedding garment. He represents all those who profess to be Christians and are not. But that this man was in the hall, sitting among the guests, helped him nothing; for the King approached him saying: "*Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wed-*

ding garment?” The King addresses him as a fraudulent and deceitful person, and such he was; for the invitation had been this: ‘Come to the marriage of the King’s Son, and here is the garment in which ye shall appear,’ but this man, passing by the wedding garment, presented himself in his own dress. So are all hypocrites.

What is the Church of Jesus Christ? It is the company of poor sinners who know and acknowledge that they have no righteousness of their own, but who believe the forgiveness of their sins for Christ’s sake, trust in His righteousness and look for salvation in Him. Hypocrites are all those who are not penitent sinners, who do not believe in Christ as their righteousness and salvation, yet associate with the Christians and profess to be Christians when they are not. They are all those who are in the visible Church, but are not of the Church. In our days, when the Church at large is become so worldly that there is scarcely any distinction any more between world and Church, this class of men comprises vast numbers. They are church members, but their heart and mind is with the world and not with Jesus Christ. All these God addresses in this wise: ‘Friend, thou knowest that this hall is for those wearing the garments of my Son Jesus Christ; how darest thou intrude here not having on the robe of Christ? Thinkest thou to deceive me?’ Learn here what grievous a thing hypocrisy is. The hypocrite intrudes himself among the children of God while being a child of Satan. *Men* he may deceive, but *God* he will not deceive. When the King will hold up to him his deceitfulness and guile he will be rendered speechless.

Why was this man speechless? Why could he find nothing whatever to say, at least to give some answer? Certainly for no other reason than because the King spake about the wedding garment. If the King had spoken about works, then this man’s tongue would have been loosed; then, doubtless, he would have said that he had done this and that, that he had accomplished great works, as at other places in the Scriptures we find that the hypocrites have much to say about the works which they have done. But here the King does not speak of works at all; not a

syllable does he say of what this man had done or had not done, save only this that he had come there without a wedding garment. His not having on the wedding garment decided the matter. On that account he is accused of hypocrisy; on that account the displeasure of the King falls upon him; on that account he is bound hand and foot and cast out into outer darkness. On the wearing or not wearing of the wedding garment depends all, salvation and damnation.

Therefore the Lord concludes our parable with the words: "*For many are called, but few are chosen.*" The chosen of God are not those who refuse to come to the marriage; for they are destroyed; nor those who come with guile in their heart; for they are cast forth from the marriage hall. The chosen of God are poor, humble, penitent souls who acknowledge that they stand no chance for heaven save alone by the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, who therefore seek the cleansing from sin in His blood and wrap up their souls in His righteousness. These are the chosen of God; for here we behold that those wearing the garment of Christ are not cast forth from the marriage hall, they remain there, and the good pleasure of the King rests upon them.

And now remember that a garment is for wear. The garments which the Lord God made for Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden were to be put on and worn by them. So the garment woven by Jesus Christ in His active and passive obedience is for wear. It was made for us, and here we are invited to put it on. Ye penitent souls, be not backward, but use all boldness. The robe of Christ's righteousness was prepared for sinners. It is for you. You have a right to it. Lay hold on Him and say: Thou wast born for me: Thou didst live for me; Thou didst die for me and for me didst rise again. Thou art mine, and I will hold Thee and will not let Thee go. Thou must be my Jesus, my Savior.

His righteousness is crown and dress
Of those who own Him Lord,
Who, sin-oppressed, find in Him rest,
And keep His faithful Word. AMEN,

XXI. SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

TEXT : So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son : for he was at the point of death. Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe. The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die. Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way ; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way. And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth. Then inquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew that it was at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth : and himself believed, and his whole house. This is again the second miracle that Jesus did, when he was come out of Judea into Galilee.—John 4, 46-54.

Speaking of the latter days, preceding His coming unto judgment, the Lord prophesied and said: “When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” Luke 18, 8. With these words the Lord did not mean to say, the true Christian faith would become altogether extinct and there would be no believers at all on the earth. The Church cannot become extinct, “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Matt. 16, 18. When the trump of the archangel shall resound to awaken the dead there will still be found a company of true believers on earth. But putting this question the Lord meant to say, in the latter days faith would greatly diminish on earth ; it would become rare among men, so that the few believers remaining must sigh: “Help, Lord ; for the godly man ceaseth ; for the faithful fail from among the children of men.” Ps. 12, 1.

It can not be denied that this diminishing of faith has already taken place and is continually increasing. Outwardly Chris-

tendom is widening its borders, but we know that the Lord does not regard numbers, neither is He deceived by an empty profession of the lips. If we open our eyes and look around in the world we can not help but see a great falling away from faith in the very midst of Christendom. Whilst missionaries are going forth to Christianize the heathen, many of those lands, which for centuries have been the seat of the Church, are fast becoming unChristian lands. Wickedness and infidelity are prevailing in them, and thousands have fallen away from the faith of their fathers. And not only do many avow their unbelief openly, even within the bounds of the Church, among professing Christians, true and living faith is rapidly failing. This is evident from many things. We see whole churches tinkering at their creeds, not in order to bring them into closer agreement with the Bible, but to make them more acceptable to the spirit of the times. We see whole denominations professing allegiance to a certain creed, and preaching and practicing the very contrary of their own creed. We annually read reports of so many thousands having been converted, but perhaps nine-tenths of them quickly became backsliders. We see many running from one church to another, now trying this, then that, never settled in their faith. We see many professing to be converted Christians who live and do just like the children of the world, so that it is often impossible to discover any difference between church-members and worldlings. These and many similar characteristics of our age surely prove that that faith which knows what it believes, which stands firm as a rock and is a living power to make man a new creature from heart, soul and mind, has greatly diminished on earth.

And even the faith of the true believers is mostly not what it ought to be. Those Christians are rare indeed who are rooted and grounded in the faith, that they stand like a sturdy oak bidding defiance to every storm. The faith of the present Christians will rather compare with a delicate reed, shaken and bent by every gust of wind. Paul, after mentioning a whole string of afflictions and trials, says: "In all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us." Rom. 8, 37.

Paul's faith stood like a rock, scorning the surgings of the waters, but how is it with us Christians of these latter days? Can we, when tried, say: "We are more than conquerors?" Alas no! but we must generally confess: We barely escaped being conquered.

Why is it that so many are uncertain about what they believe, and so wavering in their faith? One of the chief reasons undoubtedly is, because they do not build their faith on the right foundation, or do not so build on that foundation as they ought. Then only can a house stand firm, if it is built on a solid foundation, and rests upon that foundation in all its parts. Paul declared: "I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed." 2 Tim. 1, 12. He was certain that his faith rested on a solid foundation. To be certain in our faith we must be sure that our faith rests on a foundation which can neither deceive nor give way. Let us to-day earnestly consider:

THE FOUNDATION ON WHICH FAITH MUST REST, noticing

- I. What that foundation is; and
- II. The importance of building on it alone.

I.

It might be well first to state that we here distinguish between the object to which faith is directed, and the foundation on which it rests. The object of our faith is Christ and His merits. This is what we believe: that Christ is our Savior and heaven our inheritance. Christ is also properly called the foundation of our faith, because our hope of salvation is alone in Him and He is the chief corner stone in the foundation of the apostles and prophets, but the question before us is: On what must our faith rest? What surety have we for our faith? What reason have we to believe that Christ, the grace of God and the forgiveness of sins are ours? what have we to show for it that heaven is our inheritance? St. Peter commands: "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you." 1 Ep. 3, 15. We Christians should

know why we believe that grace and salvation are ours; we should be able to show a reason for our faith. If a man asks: Why do you believe that your sins are forgiven? I should be ready to give him sound and solid reasons for my faith. Asked, why we believe that the grace of God is ours, we Christians must not be obliged to answer, that we had no particular reason for believing it, neither should we produce uncertain reasons, but be ready to give reasons which must tend to convince men that our faith is well founded. But then only can we do this, if our faith rests on the one true foundation, which is the Word and promise of God, as we learn from this text.

The miracle related in our text was performed by the Lord in the first year of His public ministrations, but His fame had already spread throughout Galilee. So also this nobleman had heard of the things which Jesus had done at Cana and Jerusalem. Perhaps he had heard Jesus preach and had seen Him perform miracles at Capernaum, and he had come to this faith that the power of God was with Jesus. Therefore when his son was stricken with a deadly sickness he in his distress went to seek help with Jesus. But his faith was not yet what it ought to have been. His mind was still entangled in errors and his heart not free from scruples. We read of him: "*When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death.*" This man evidently had the idea, to heal his son Jesus must travel to Capernaum, must be present at the sick-bed and, probably, must use certain words and perform some peculiar acts. This nobleman was like unto that leprous Syrian, Naaman, who, when the prophet Elisha would not come out to him, but simply sent him word what to do, was wroth and said: "I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper." 2 Kings 5, 11. Because the prophet did not do what Naaman had expected him to do he lost confidence in Elisha; for his trust had been connected with the idea that the prophet must heal him in a certain manner, or by a peculiar process.

So likewise this nobleman's trust rested largely on the opinion that Jesus must come down to Capernaum, and must heal his son by a certain procedure; for when Jesus did not forthwith consent to accompany him he said: "*Sir, come down ere my child die.*" He wanted the Lord to come to his house, because he thought the Lord must be personally present at the bedside, and he wanted the Lord to come quickly, because he thought, if his son were once dead it would be too late. He did not believe that Jesus could awaken from the dead. Behold, how this man's mind was yet entangled in error and in part his trust stood on his own thoughts and ideas as to how and when Jesus must heal his son.

The consequence was that this nobleman's faith was not established and firm, but weak and wavering. He was not free from scruples and doubts. This is manifest from the words which the Lord spake unto him, saying: "*Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.*" On some other occasions the Lord forthwith consented to do what was asked of Him. When that leper said: "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean," He answered: "I will; be thou clean." Matt. 8, 3. When the centurion of Capernaum besought Him for his servant He said: "I will come and heal him." But with this nobleman the Lord did not so. Hearing his petition the Lord began to argue with the man, and spake as though He were seeking an excuse to refuse his request. Why was this? O, the Lord's words give the reason. This man did not put undivided confidence in what he had heard of Jesus and His deeds. He came with the thought in the background of his heart that he must first see the Lord perform a miracle before putting full confidence in Him. The all-seeing eye of the Lord discerned this thought of his heart, and he held it up to him, saying: "*Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.*" With these words the Lord exposes the nobleman's idea that he did not regard the Word which he had heard sufficient foundation for a full and undivided trust, but wanted to see for himself. He wanted to rest his faith, not on the Word alone, but besides the Word on his own eyesight and experience.

This rebuke of the Lord could not fail to make a mighty impression on the nobleman's mind. He must have thought: This Jesus is a wonderful man; He must be more than a man, He must be the all-seeing God, because He knows the secret thought of my heart. And now when the Lord said unto him: "*Go thy way; thy son liveth,*" now this Word was sufficient unto him; for it is said: "*And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way.*" Now the nobleman was freed from the idea that Jesus must come down to his house in order to heal his son; now he did no more want to see first and then believe; now the Word of Jesus: "*Thy son liveth,*" took hold on his heart and created in him undoubting confidence in its Divine truth and Divine power. He had nothing save only this one word to rely on. In those days there were no telegraph wires that he could have received a dispatch from home, informing him of the improvement of his son. Jesus did perform a miracle, one of His greatest miracles, but He did it in such a way that this nobleman could not perceive it with his senses. He had nothing on which to rest his confidence save alone the Word of Jesus. But the man needed nothing more. He had the Word of Jesus, and he quietly went his way never doubting that he would find his son living and restored.

This is the foundation on which our faith must rest: the Word of the Lord and nothing else besides it. We must not put our trust in our own thoughts, our own ideas and opinions, our prosperity, our piety, our sensations and experiences, or our combinations and conclusions which we make from the Word. In spiritual things our faith must stand purely and alone on the Word of God, but on it fully and freely. We must not do like this nobleman did at first, but as he did at last. What this nobleman first asked of the Lord was refused; the Lord did not go with him to Capernaum; and what this nobleman desired secretly in his heart, the Lord did also not do. The man wanted to see a miracle, but the Lord performed no miracle before his eyes so that he could see it. The Lord so arranged His conversation with this man, that at the last there was nothing left for the nobleman to trust in save alone the Word of Jesus, and to

his undying praise it is recorded in the sacred annals: "*And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him.*"

II.

Now this history was not transcribed for this nobleman's sake, but for our learning, that from his example we should learn to build our faith alone on the Word of God and besides it to look for nothing else on which to rest our trust; and this lesson we should heed and should not pass it by or set it aside, because in this matter our salvation is at stake. If the Scriptures teach any thing they certainly do teach that we are saved through faith; yet not through a false faith, but only through the right faith, resting on the right foundation. If we make unto ourselves a wrong trust we cannot be saved by it. This is a truth which needs no proof. A drowning man, who catches at straws and bubbles instead of the rope which is thrown to him, is not saved.

But the lesson which we should here particularly learn is this truth that only then when it rests alone on the Word of God our faith can make us certain of possessing grace and salvation with a Divine and infallible certainty. The Word of God alone is infallible; therefore that faith alone can give infallible certainty to the heart which is built on the Word of God. So long as a man's trust stands on any thing besides the Word, his faith cannot make the heart certain. We have a plain example in this nobleman. So long as his mind was entangled in the error that Jesus must come down to Capernaum in order to heal his son, so long as he wanted to see a miracle before putting his whole confidence in the Lord, so long the man was full of fears and doubts and apprehensions. Just consider his anxious petition: "*Sir, come down ere my child die.*" These words are an expression of the anxiety of his heart, an outcry of a hard-pressed soul. He feared his mission would be a failure, if the Lord would tarry long. But after he had once come to cling to the Lord's Word alone and let all other things go, then his heart became quiet, then his soul was filled with confidence and certainty. Explicitly does the text say: "*The man believed*

the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way."

How did he go? Did he run to see if it was really so that his son was restored? O no; for that would have been a proof that he did not fully believe, but still entertained some doubts about the Word Jesus had spoken unto him. What great confidence and certainty this man had is clearly shown by the circumstances. From Cana to Capernaum was some twenty odd miles. The time when Jesus said unto him: "*Thy son liveth,*" was "*at the seventh hour,*" according to our computation of time about one o'clock in the afternoon. In six or seven hours the man could have walked to Capernaum and so could have reached home that same day, but he was not in a hurry; he took his time and even stopped under way to stay over night; for the next day his servants met him on the way and told him: "*Thy son liveth.*" Behold what it means when it is here said: "*And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him.*" He had the Word of Jesus and he had no misgivings about it, and no more any anxiety about his son, and therefore was not in a hurry about getting home. "He that believeth shall not make haste." Isaiah 28, 16.

This nobleman's faith is truly a notable and highly instructive example. It is certain that he was not altogether without faith when he started from Capernaum, but he did not wholly and freely trust the Word which he had heard about Jesus; he had his mental reservations, and the consequence was that his soul was uneasy and his heart restless; but when he had once reached this point that he put away everything else and clung alone to the Word of Jesus then his heart was at rest. Build your faith purely and alone on the Word of God and your soul will find rest, but add one thing on which to rest your trust aside from the Word, and your heart can not be at peace. The reason for this is very obvious. The Word is Divine and infallible and, therefore, creates Divine and infallible certainty in the heart; all other things are uncertain and perishable, and the trust built on them must also be uncertain and will pass away. If the foundation is rock on all sides the house will stand firm; if the one

side is sand the building will shortly be drawn out of shape. If you would have that faith which truly brings certainty and an infallible hope to the heart, you must set aside all other things and must build your trust alone on the Word of the Lord.

Where is this faith found in our days? Does not, so to say, every body walk after his own thoughts and go by what he thinks right, or what he is told by others without searching the Scriptures whether it is truly the Word of the Lord? So the multitude does, and therefore there is so much uncertainty and wavering, and so little faith among the people. But let us not be carried away by the current of the times. Let us bear in mind to build our faith alone on that which, without a question, will carry us through before the judgment seat of God. Let us not commit the folly of setting our trust on something which must be rejected in the court of heaven. Now if I appear before the heavenly tribunal with the plea: I did what was right and practiced virtue, would not the Judge answer: Who told you that your doing right would save you? Did you never read in my Word: "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified"? Rom. 3, 20. Or if I appear with the plea: I was told that the new birth is accompanied by a sensation of sweetness, and I experienced a peculiar emotion, and I took it for the new birth and the witness of Thy Spirit and depended on it, would not the Judge answer: Where did you read in my Word that a sensation of sweetness is the witness of my Spirit? Did I not warn you by my servant Solomon, saying: "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool"? Prov. 28, 26. And why did you not search my Word, but go by what you were told? Or if I come with the plea: In my time it was a common saying, it would make no difference what a man believed if he would only be sincere in his faith; so I did not search much, but believed what suited me best, would not the Judge answer: Thou evil servant, if it suited thee not, to search in my Word, thou wilt not suit for the new Jerusalem. But if I appear with the plea: Lord, I was conceived and born in sins and daily committed much sin, and according to right and justice I deserve only wrath and everlasting punishment; but by Thy prophets and apostles

Thou didst speak unto a lost world and didst say, that Thou hast made Thy Son Jesus Christ righteousness for sinners; to Him I appeal according to Thy Word, must then not the righteous Judge who can not deny Himself, and can not go back on His Word, answer and say: Yes, so I have said, and "blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." AMEN.

XXII. SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

TEXT : Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants, which owed him a hundred pence : and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellow-servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not : but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me : shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee ? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.—Matt. 18, 23-35.

The Christian religion is a religion of forgiveness. Forgiveness in heaven above, forgiveness on earth beneath, forgiveness in general is the sum and substance of our most holy religion. The whole Gospel doctrine may be summed up in these two sentences : From pure grace for the sake of the merits of Jesus Christ, His Son and our Brother, God freely forgives us all our sins, and this forgiveness we are to believe ; and because God is so gracious toward us we should also forgive the trespasses of men against us, and this forgiveness we are to practice.

By this the Christian religion is distinguished from all others. All other religions teach nothing of reconciliation and forgive-

ness, but only of recompense and reward. The adherents of all other religions, be they Mohammedans, Jews, or Gentiles, hope to enter heaven, not because their sins are forgiven freely by grace, and eternal life is obtained as a free and unmerited gift of God, but because they think to earn the favor of God by their own deeds of worship and piety. And as the heathen does not believe the forgiveness of sin before God in heaven, so he does also not practice forgiveness toward his fellow man. A heathen may be what people call a good-natured man; he may be moved to compassion toward sufferers; he may give alms, help the weak against their oppressors and the like, but freely to forgive evils done unto him by his enemies, of this he knows nothing. As the natural and all invented religions know nothing of Divine grace and free forgiveness with God, but only teach reward of man's own good works and piety, so they also teach only that a man should not do wrong unto others, but do not teach that a man should freely forgive and cheerfully suffer wrongs done unto him by others without seeking to retaliate.

But our Lord Jesus Christ requires more of His followers. Whilst all human religions teach men to do to others as they deserve, Christ commands: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." *Matt. 5, 44.* In the book of Exodus it is said: "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," *Ch. 21, 24*, but that was only a civil law by which civil judges in Israel were to pronounce judgment; but Christ in the prayer which He gave us for our daily use embodied the petition: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." As often as we repeat this prayer we confess that we have trespassed against God and we ask Him to forgive us, not because we deserve it or are worthy of it,—a trespass deserves punishment and not forgiveness—, but because in His Son Jesus Christ He is become a good and gracious Father unto us. This petition is the heart's desire of all those who are truly Christians; for in the 32d Psalm it is said: "For this," the forgiveness of sin, "shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found." Any one who does

not ask forgiveness of sin in prayer is not godly; he is not a Christian indeed and in truth.

In the most forcible manner possible does the Lord emphasize that forgiveness is the very essence of His religion when He adds the words: "As we forgive those who trespass against us." We do not ask God to forgive us *because* we forgive others; for that would be basing forgiveness on our own works, but "*as we forgive,*" whereby we declare that we do and will forgive those who sin against us, and that we will forgive them as we desire God to forgive us. So this prayer which the Lord has given us for daily use does not only demonstrate in a general way that Christianity is a religion of forgiveness, it daily reminds us that this is our sacred duty as followers of Jesus Christ, that we walk in love toward others, that we do wrong to no man, and if others do wrong to us that we stand ready to forgive them and to do good unto them. Both are pictured to us in the parable before us. Let us therefore consider:

WHAT SHOULD MOVE US TO FORGIVE MEN THEIR TRESPASSES
AGAINST US?

Our text answers:

- I. The mercy of God toward us;
- II. The dire consequences of not forgiving.

I.

The occasion for the Lord to propound this parable was the question of Peter: "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? till seven times?" To this question the Lord replied: "I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven." In our arithmetic 70 times 7 makes 490, but here the arithmetics composed by our schoolmen are all wrong. In the Lord's arithmetic 70 times 7 makes: Every time. On another occasion the Lord said: "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again unto thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him." Luke 17, 3. 70 times 7 makes every time. Forgive him every time.

This example in arithmetic is illustrated by this parable: "*Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.*" This kingdom we must not seek in heaven above or in hell below, but here on earth; for in heaven there are only holy angels and perfected saints, in hell only devils and men who are forever rejected from the countenance of God; but here upon earth there are those with whom God has not yet had a final settlement, men who are to be saved. This king is God; His servants are we and all that are called Christians. Most people, indeed, would rather not have any lord at all over them, but God is the Lord over all. Whether men like it or not, acknowledge it or not, God is Lord over them, and He has the right and power to call them to account.

How does God call men to account? He does it by heralds, and because He is God He appoints such heralds, whose voice reaches every man, whom no man can escape, though he hide in the bowels of the earth, or flee to the uttermost parts of the sea; heralds who accuse the guilty and convict them of being in debt to their Lord. Though wicked servants say: "God hath forgotten: he hideth his face; he will never see it;" though they argue: "Thou wilt not require it"; (Psalm 10), yet in due time God's heralds find them out and convince them that God does see, that their debts are recorded in God's account-book and are not forgotten. The first of these heralds which God ordained even at the creation is the law implanted into the heart of men: Conscience. This herald dwells in the bosom of every man and follows him all the days of his life, as St. Paul writes of the Gentiles: "They are a law unto themselves: their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts accusing, or else excusing one another." Rom. 2, 14. This herald in his own bosom witnesses to every man, whether or not he is a faithful servant who has done and is doing what he ought to do. But because this herald in his own bosom does no more uncover to man the full account standing against him, and men are inclined to pay little attention to conscience, therefore God appointed another herald, which is yet not another. On Mount Sinai He gave His law in writing and commanded it to be proclaimed on earth, and now

through all His appointed ministers who are bold enough to preach the law, He proclaims: Ye children of men, come and render account to the Lord your God. He has shown Himself a lenient Lord and has given you only ten commandments to keep. If you have kept them, you shall receive from your righteous and just Lord praise and reward; if you have not kept them, acknowledge that you have fallen into debt with your Lord. Thus God calls us to account whilst we are still living on earth through the still small voice of right and wrong in our own bosoms and through the preaching of the law.

What does the account show? Are you in debt with God or not? "*And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him which owed him ten thousand talents.*" That is the outcome: a debt of "*ten thousand talents.*" Is that much or little? Our powers of intellect are too weak to cipher out the whole amount in full, but let us look at the sum here mentioned. The talent with the ancients was a denomination of money, in our coin about \$1,500. Fifteen hundred multiplied by ten thousand makes fifteen millions. Fifteen million dollars, surely an enormous debt. Do you think within yourself: That is exaggerating things? my debt with God cannot be that great? Friend, I advise you to examine the account-book and to sum up the entries against you. The ten commandments are the book which shows the account against us. But these you must examine carefully, or you will be sure to overlook many an entry. The way to find the amount is, to take each particular point in each commandment and to compare with it the thoughts of your heart, the words of your tongue and the works of your hand since your childhood days. For instance: In the second commandment you are commanded to pray, and to pray diligently and devotedly. Now if you count up how often you have neglected to pray, and how often, when you did pray, your mind, instead of being wholly wrapped up in your conversation with God, was distracted by other thoughts, you will be obliged to charge many a dollar simply for this one thing of neglecting prayer, or praying with little or no devotion. And if in this manner you go through the whole book of the law, you will no

more accuse the Lord of exaggerating your debt, but you will be obliged to say: "Mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me." Ps. 38, 4.

Remember that the reckoning is not made by our account which we keep. Perhaps this servant belonged to that class of people who keep on borrowing, but never make a record of it and are glad to forget it. But this King keeps His own account and He can cipher it all up to each of His servants. He says: "I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings." Jer. 17, 10. Hear it, you that walk in sin.

A book is opened then to all,
A record truly telling
What each hath done, both great and small,
When he on earth was dwelling.

And that King will be able to prove every entry against you, and you will not be able to answer Him one in a thousand.

What shall God do with servants who are so deeply indebted? "*But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.*" This was the law and justice of ancient days. If a man contracted debts which he could not pay, he and his family were sold into slavery, and the proceeds were taken to pay his debts. In our effeminate age, when the sense of honesty is become so greatly blunted, this sounds hard and unjust, but so God had ordered it in the Jewish law, as may be seen from Leviticus 25, and it was neither cruel nor unjust that a man was made to serve for debts which he had contracted. Because we are so deeply involved in debt, and have nothing wherewith to pay, God commands us to be sold and payment to be made according to justice; and there is one who is always ready to buy the souls of men and to torment them with everlasting chains in flames of fire. Because we were unfaithful servants, and have contracted so immense a debt, therefore, according to right and justice, we are sold into death; for "the wages of sin is death." Rom. 6, 23.

What shall we do? We cannot deny the debt, neither can we deny that God has the right to demand payment of us, and the power to make us suffer for contracting debts which we are not able to pay. Shall we do what this servant did, of whom the Lord says: "*The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all*"? This man must have been beside himself, that he did not know what he was doing. He owed his master fifteen millions: he had nothing in the world with which to pay the first dollar, and he promises to pay all. So all those people do who say, they would do good and make up again for their former evil life. Imagine a man who has nothing and is in such a situation that he never will have anything, promising to pay a debt of a hundred dollars only, would not, in business life, that man be regarded a madman or a deceiver? So people do in spiritual things. First they contract a debt of sin, and then they say they would pay it off again by doing good. How can people act so foolishly? Because they overlook two things. In the first place, the greatness of the debt. If people would study the law and consider how innumerable and abominable their sins are before God, they would not think of undertaking to pay the debt. In the second place, people overlook the fact that they are not at all in a situation to pay the very first cent of the debt. What we poor sinful mortals can do is only to run into debt deeper every day. And even though a man could to-day cease sinning and do only good, he would only be doing his duty for to-day, and that could certainly not make up for the evil done yesterday. We must not act so foolishly as to undertake to pay those fifteen million, but rather acknowledge it true that we do owe those ten thousand talents, and that our Lord has the right in hand and is justified in commanding us to be sold into everlasting slavery.

How shall help come to us, since we are so hopelessly in debt that there is no possibility of our extricating ourselves? The help of this servant came from his lord: "*Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.*" This lord did not deal with his servant

according to right, but according to mercy, and so the servant was helped; but this was compassion and not debt on the part of his lord. Our Lord owes us no mercy. He might well say: You have contracted this debt, and I have the right to exact payment from you; neither am I minded to surrender my right for your sake. I say, if our Lord would say thus we would have no just reason to complain, because we would only be receiving our dues.

O what a blessed thing, that our Lord is a compassionate Lord, who has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rejoices in life. His own compassion moved Him to desire us to live and not to die. Yet He could not alter His justice, because He is the Unalterable One, and His justice demanded that our debt must be paid before we could be permitted to live. But so strong was our Lord's desire to show mercy unto us that He sought and found ways and means how to unite mercy and justice. "He made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." 2 Cor. 5, 21. To speak in the language of our parable: God sent His own Son to become our bondsman and to pay our debt of ten thousand talents, wherefore the Son says in the 69th Psalm: "I restored that which I took not away," and what He gave in payment of our debt He tells us in the 6th chapter of John, saying: "The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." The coin which He gave in payment of our debt is His flesh; so there can be no doubt that the debt is paid in full and justice is satisfied; for the flesh of the Son of God must surely ten thousand times outbalance the ten thousand talents of our debt. Therefore we must not, like this servant, promise to pay, but acknowledging our debt we should ask the Lord to have mercy on us, appealing to the payment which Jesus Christ has made for us, and claiming it for our own. This is the way to become rid of our debt, and it is a sure way; for to appeal to and to claim the payment which Christ made is the same as eating His flesh, eating that which He gave in payment, and thereof He says: "As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth

me, even he shall live by me." John 6, 57. As surely as He lives by the Father, so surely shall you who lay claim to His ransom live by Him.

II.

"But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest." One hundred pence make about fourteen dollars. Ten thousand talents had been forgiven this man, and now he takes his fellow-servant by the throat on account of fourteen dollars. The man did not have the money, and he did exactly what his creditor had done, he *"fell down at his feet and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all,"* but he cast him into prison. When the lord of these servants was informed of this transaction he called that unmerciful man and said unto him: *"O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee?"* And now his lord again became angry with him, *"and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him."* And this is the application which the Lord makes: *"So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."* This, therefore, is the doctrine of this parable: Because God forgave us ten thousand talents we ought to forgive our neighbor the hundred pence; or, Because God forgives us our trespasses against Him, therefore we should forgive the trespasses of our neighbor against us, and if we, after obtaining forgiveness with God, will not forgive our brother, we again lose the forgiveness with God.

Here one might object and say: Did not that servant have a right to ask his fellow-servant to pay what he owed? Those must be singular laws which would sentence a man to be cast into prison for collecting moneys due him. And should a Christian, when men wrong him, be bound straightway to forgive, and not be allowed to remind men of their wrong and to

require them to make amends? To apply the parable in that kind of a way would be wrenching it from the object for which it is given. The Lord does not say that this man did wrong in asking his debtor to pay what he owed, neither does the Lord teach that a Christian must forthwith forgive a brother's trespasses without rebuking him. For the protection of property, life and honor the civil government is ordained; and as concerning forgiveness, the Lord teaches that it is one thing to have a forgiving heart, and another thing to extend forgiveness with lip and hand; for thus He says: "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him." A Christian is to love all, and hate no one, and love must prompt him to rebuke a trespassing brother, but the word of forgiveness and the hand of reconciliation he can extend to those only who want his forgiveness. Not this was the guilt of this man that he reminded his fellow-servant of his debt, but that, when his fellow-servant besought him, he would have no compassion on him.

The Lord here names debts of money meaning debts of sin, and He wants us to argue in this wise: Because God forgives me my trespasses against Him, therefore I must show that I am a child of God minded like God, and must forgive my neighbor his trespasses against me; and if I will not do this, if I say: That man has wronged me and I have a right to be angry with him, then I give evidence upon myself that I am not minded like God, that I am not His child and have no forgiveness with Him. This is a matter of great importance; for the Lord did certainly not speak this parable without a reason, but because there is danger for the Christian to lose the grace of God in like manner as this servant lost the favor of his lord. A man comes to Christ and obtains forgiveness in Him, but thereafter it occurs that men wrong him, and seeing that he is to suffer the mockery, the malice, the deceit of men, without seeking to retaliate, he is offended in the cross of Christ, gives room to anger and hate in his heart, and has fallen from grace. This stumbling-block the devil frequently casts in the way of a

Christian, and it is always a strong temptation, because the old nature is proud, easily offended and desperately inclined to seek revenge. Therefore we must be on our guard against this temptation, and must gird our loins diligently to practice the virtue of forgiving. Though men often wrong us we should not give way to the old Adam, but should banish anger and spite from the heart, and as often as an offending brother comes acknowledging his wrong and asking pardon, we should be quick to extend the hand of reconciliation. Never should we lose sight of the great truth taught by the amounts mentioned in this parable. What God must forgive me, me who am but a servant not worthy of His notice, amounts to ten thousand talents, and all this debt God forgives me freely for Christ's sake; what I may be called on to forgive my brother who is my equal, or perhaps better than I, will not overrun a hundred pence. "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." 1 John 4, 11.

Have you experienced the forgiveness of God? Then do not like this servant, who "*went out*" from his lord, and who, forgetting his lord's mercy quickly, forgot to practice mercy. If you can freely say: 'Tis by the mercy of my God that I am cleansed from sin, then let your heart sing that tune day by day, and constrained by the love of Christ you will find little difficulty in forgiving men their trespasses. AMEN.

XXIII. SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

TEXT: Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk. And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar, or not? But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Show me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Cæsar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's. When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way.—Matt. 22, 15–22.

Ever since the times of the first French Revolution, a century ago, there is much talk in the world about all men being born equal, and having equal rights and claims on the earth. This theory of equality was advanced by French atheists, Voltaire, Rousseau, and others, and a partial attempt at practicing it was made under the first French Republic amid blood and carnage. Since that time these theories of equality have been advocated and extended until they have now reached their most radical form in what is called Communism and Anarchism. Of these “isms” we now hear and read continually.

What do those people want? They want to abolish government, authority, property, religion, church, every thing. They want to upset the whole social order of the world, and to introduce a totally new order. They want a world without God, without religion, without government, without restraint. St. Paul writes that in the latter days perilous times would come, when men would give heed to “seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.” 1 Tim. 4, 1. These seducing spirits have come; for the theories of those who would subvert God's order are certainly doctrines of devils, and these doctrines have infected the masses throughout the civilized world to so fearful an extent that rulers must daily fear for their lives and property holders must

be in anxiety about their possessions. And as to the Church it can only expect days of persecution and tribulation, if the wild theories of Destructionists should become dominant.

In these teachings we behold the legitimate fruit of infidelity. Because men deny the existence of God, therefore they also deny that the order of society, as it now is, was made by God. They say: Men made it so and men could change it. And many who do not entertain the doctrines of Destructionists, even some Christians, regard civil government virtually nothing more than a human arrangement, first invented by Nimrod. Now Nimrod was the first to exercise tyranny upon earth after the flood, but the order of government was instituted by God Himself; for thus St. Paul writes, Romans 13: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be, are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God." The power of government in its variety of forms is God's ordinance. In a Republic like ours the officers elected by the people are nevertheless appointed of God; for He governs our elections, and no man obtains an office without His will.

Government being God's ordinance, it is self-evident that we Christians can have nothing to do with any and all theories which tend to destroy this ordinance of God. With word and pen we should be set against all teachings which are subversive of civil government and good order, and we should at all times show ourselves law-abiding citizens who seek the good of their land and nation. Good Christians must also be good citizens; this is the Lord's will expressed in the text before us. Hence let me speak of:

THE RELATION BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE, showing

- I. What alone is the right relation; and
- II. What duties devolve on Christian citizens in this regard.

I.

In manifold parables the Lord rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy and malice, and at last He directly told

them: "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof," Matt. 21, 43, and this He illustrated by the parable of the king's marriage. For this the chief priests and Pharisees would gladly have laid hands on Him, but were afraid to do this because of the people. So they went and "*took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk.*" A glorious testimony for the Lord. No man can receive a better testimony than this, that his enemies who are bent on his destruction can prove no evil or misdeed on him. The Lord Jesus did suffer poverty, persecution and the penalty of death on account of sin, yet not for misdoings of His own. In all His life and walk the Pharisees could discover no evil, and so the Pharisees themselves bear testimony that what He suffered on earth He suffered for strange, for our sins. This fact that the Pharisees saw no other way to destroy Him than by entangling Him in His talk is a testimony unto us that He is our Savior indeed.

What counsel did those men find against the Lord? They attempted to draw a political declaration from Him which must result in evil to Him. For this purpose "*they sent their disciples with the Herodians,*" to put a question to Jesus. Herod Antipas, king over Galilee, owed his crown and all to the friendship of the emperor, and his adherents formed a royalist party who were always ready to report any plots or signs of revolt against the Romans. A very necessary service, because the Jews hated the Romans intensely, not only on account of the heavy taxes which the Romans imposed, but chiefly because they thought it against the dignity of God's chosen people and against the law of Moses to pay tribute to a Gentile ruler. Hence the state of affairs was such that a man had to be careful in his utterances. One who did or said any thing against the Romans in public was very apt to be reported by the Herodians; and any one who adhered to the Romans and advocated subjection to them was hated and despised by the people as a traitor to his country, and an enemy of the temple and the true worship of God.

Instructed by their masters and accompanied by several Hero-

dians those disciples of the Pharisees came to the Lord, when much people were gathered together, and said: "*Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?*" They flatter Him as being a teacher of the truth, who would frankly speak the truth, whether it bring Him honor or dishonor, gain or loss. What they say of the Lord is perfectly true, but they spake these words deceitfully, both to hide their intention and to place their question in such a connection that, as they calculated, the Lord would be obliged to answer straightforward with yea or nay. They thought if the Lord would answer: Yes, the people would regard and shun Him as a traitor to His nation and religion; if He would answer: No, the servants of Herod were there to lay hands on Him; if He evaded the question, or left it unanswered, then they would have taken occasion to say, He feared the Romans, or could not answer, and therefore He could neither be the Messiah nor a prophet. How did the Lord answer?

He knew their design and first of all exposed their wicked thoughts, saying: "*Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?*" As they had flatteringly said unto Him, He proved to them that He regarded not their person, but called them by their right name, and gave them to understand that He knew the thoughts of their heart. By these words they seem to have been much disconcerted; for when He requested them to show Him the tribute money they quickly handed Him a penny, and to His question: "*Whose is this image, and superscription?*" they answer readily: "*Cæsar's.*" We must not think that this "*tribute money*" was a special kind of money; the Lord simply asked for a piece of money which was legal tender in the land and with which the taxes were paid. Neither was the Lord ignorant as to how the money looked and what was inscribed on it; He simply called for a coin in order to render His answer indisputable; for when they had conceded that the Roman money, bearing the image and inscription of the Roman emperor, was

legal tender in the land, He said: "*Render therefore unto Cæsar, the things which are Cæsar's.*" That it was right that Cæsar's money be rendered to Cæsar, was now too plain to say any thing against it. A very simple truth which admitted of no dispute. The United States money is our legal tender; hence we are in duty bound to pay tribute to the United States government. With the Canadians the English money is legal tender; hence they are bound to pay tribute to the English government. The Jews had no mint of their own, but were obliged to use Cæsar's money, so they were subjects of and owed tribute to Cæsar. And because the Jews thought it against God and His law to pay tribute to a Gentile ruler, therefore the Lord added that paying tribute to Cæsar need not and must not interfere with their religious duties, saying: "*And unto God the things that are God's.*"

According to the connection, the Lord very simply meant to say, they should render to the emperor what he had the right, or, at least, the power, to exact from them, and besides this they should give to the temple, the priests and the Levites what God in the law commanded them to give. That was imposing a double and a very heavy burden on the Jews; for the Romans demanded exorbitant tribute, and the law of Moses required them to give the tenth part of their income to God, yet the Lord here declares it their duty to do both. Church and state are to be separate, and we are to perform our duty toward each of them.

Why it is the Lord's will that church and state are to be kept separate becomes very clear to the mind, when we consider the nature and the functions of each of these institutions. The state is an earthly, visible institution, intended for this life only; the church, or the kingdom of Christ is a spiritual, invisible, heavenly institution, which is to endure in time and eternity. "My kingdom is not of this world," John 18, 36, said Jesus to Pilate, and again: "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation; for behold the kingdom of God is within you." Luke 17, 20. The outward assembly of those who profess to be Christians is indeed visible, but Christ has His kingdom in the

hearts of men, and no man can separate the true from the sham Christians. Of the state a person becomes a citizen by birth, or by naturalization; of the church one becomes a member by the new birth through faith in Christ. Thus church and state are in their very nature two entirely different institutions.

State and church therefore also stand on different foundations. The state is founded on the natural law which is inherent in the heart of man. Hence there have been great states and good governments among the heathen who knew nothing of the Bible. The old Romans and Germans laid down a system of excellent laws, when they were yet heathen. But the church is built on the revealed Word of God, as Paul writes: "Ye are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone." Eph. 2, 20. The lawbook of the church is the Bible. Hence it is that the state allows many things which the church cannot sanction, and a well informed Christian will never argue: The government allows it; therefore I am justified in doing it. In the church is forbidden whatever the Bible forbids, although the government may allow or even command it.

Likewise, state and church are instituted for entirely different ends. The state is to protect its subjects in body, honor and property, to punish evil-doers and to promote the prosperity of the commonwealth; but the church is to see that souls are saved from sin and eternal damnation. Two entirely different missions.

To accomplish their mission church and state must employ very different means. The state has the power of the sword. It uses forcible means and may even go to war to secure the rights of its citizens; for of the ruler Paul says: "He beareth not the sword in vain." Rom. 13, 4. But the armory of the church is found only in the Bible. When Peter drew the sword to defend his Master, the Lord ordered him to put it up again. The church is to cut off impenitent sinners from her communion, and she is to refuse fellowship to heretics, but forcible means she must never employ; temporal punishments she must never impose, or she frustrates her own mission. True piety of the

heart cannot be produced by compulsion of law, but only by persuasion of the Word of God.

By the good providence of God we have the right relation between church and state in our country. Complete liberty of conscience is guaranteed to every one of our citizens, and the church, as such, has nothing to say in civil affairs. This is as Christ wanted it, when He said: Give to Cæsar what is due him and to God what belongs to Him.

II.

To say that we have the relation between church and state as God wants it in the New Testament is saying, that we enjoy a great privilege. What God ordains will always serve for man's true welfare. The blending of church and state is a curse, their separation a blessing. Both could easily be illustrated from history, but let us rather look to the duties which devolve on us as Christians and citizens of a free republic. Here a threefold duty is laid upon us.

In the first place, it is our duty to do our part towards preserving and perpetuating religious liberty in our country. If ever the civil authorities introduce measures which are oppressive of conscience, and if ever a religious sect seeks political power and influence we should discountenance both as against the Scriptures and subversive of the fundamental principles of our government. Especially should we have an eye to keeping the advocating of political measures out of the house of worship. A preacher who brings politics to the pulpit does not only betray his mission,—the Lord's marching orders to His ministers are: "Go ye and preach the Gospel"—, he can not even be counted a good and loyal citizen; for the Constitution of the United States wants the pulpit and the political platform kept separate, and the preacher who brings politics to the pulpit places himself into antagonism with the Constitution of the land.

It is the duty of all good citizens to see that politics and religion remain unmixed, but we Lutherans have a special reason to be watchful in this respect. Martin Luther was the first man who advocated the separation of church and state, and this prin-

ciple our church embodied in her Confessions; for in the last article of the Augsburg Confession it is distinctly said: "These two governments, the civil and ecclesiastical, ought not to be mingled and confounded." In Switzerland, France and England the Protestants appealed to arms, but Luther persistently rejected and condemned the use of weapons or forcible means on the part of the church. He declared that the church's only weapon is the Word of God. This weapon he plied vigorously against popery and all errorists of his day, but he insisted that no man should be persecuted on account of his doctrine and faith, unless he would preach insurrection against the government. After Luther's death the Protestant rulers began to meddle in church affairs, but this was done in violation of Luther's doctrine and the Confessions of our church. Our church as such always advocates the full separation of church and state, and she cannot otherwise, because it is taught in the New Testament. Never should we neglect to pray for the liberty of the church, as Paul exhorts, "that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks be made for all men: for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior." 1 Tim. 2, 1.

In the second place, there is laid upon us the duty to "*render unto Cæsar, the things which are Cæsar's.*" In a republic it is very important that Christians should diligently perform the duties of citizens. A Christian should be a public-spirited man, should keep himself informed on the tendency of public affairs, should give his voice and his vote only for that which is right, and in every way should seek to promote the prosperity of the commonwealth.

Of course, every citizen is to "*render tribute,*" pay tax. When the government levies a tax we are to pay it, and we should be conscientious about paying it. A tax debt is just as well a debt as any other. We should pay our taxes, not only because we must and will be fined if we do not, but for conscience sake, because God has commanded it, and what God has commanded we should do cheerfully.

When the assessor comes around every citizen is in duty bound to give in all his taxable property and to name as near as possible its taxable value. Every one who purposely undervalues his property, or does not mention things on which he knows a tax is laid, cheats the government. Just in this there is a vast amount of cheating, lying and false swearing done in the land. There are many men who are honest enough in their ordinary dealings, but if they can deceive the assessor, so that they are not taxed as high as they ought to be, they are ready to do it. But what is the difference between defrauding the government of that which ought to be rendered to it, and cheating a private citizen?

But if the government officers also cheat? Yes, there are thousands who can make a great outcry, if a government officer becomes manifest as a thief, and perhaps those very same men will cheat the government whenever they have a chance. It is bad enough that so many of our public men are so greedy for unjust gain, but that can certainly not justify any one citizen in defrauding the government.

We should remember that herein too we Christians are to shine as lights in the world. It is a great evil, if men of the world can point to a professing Christian and can say: He, too, understands how to outwit the government. Such a professing Christian does not only defraud the government, he commits the far greater sin of setting an evil example and confirming others in evildoing. The more prevalent corruption is in the land, the more diligent should we be to show ourselves a good salt.

Besides tribute we owe subjection to the government, and a Christian citizen should never presume to take the functions of the government into his own hands. He may be obliged to defend his own or the life of others against assassins; but taking part in mobs, lynchings and the like, is not self-defense. Lynchers take the law into their own hands when there is no necessity for it. They are guilty of a kind of insurrection and they violate their citizen's oath, and that lynchers frequently go unpunished cannot justify their proceedings. In these unruly times it is well to remember the warning word of Solomon,

when he says: "My son, fear thou the Lord and the king; and meddle not with them that are given to change: for their calamity shall rise suddenly." Prov. 24, 21. Beware, and be not carried away by excitement to commit deeds which you must rue behind iron bars with a bad conscience.

Enjoying full liberty to do so the duty devolves on us, to give heart and hand for the upbuilding of the church and the spreading of the Gospel. How could we fold our hands and be idle when multitudes of our nation are perishing in ignorance? Possessing the saving truth we should confess it, advocate it, teach it, preach it, publish it in books and pamphlets, and send forth missionaries to proclaim it. We should unfurl the banner of the Gospel and let it fly in the winds that the lovers of the truth and the souls hungering and thirsting after righteousness may see it and may be gathered around it. Is not Christ's kingdom worthy to be expanded? We have free institutions of government and a great republic, but all its glory is a mere shadow of the glory of Christ's kingdom. What is the habeas corpus law, the right to vote, the privilege to carry weapons in comparison to the forgiveness of sin, freedom from the curse of Moses, peace with God? Undying praise belongs to Washington, but Jesus Christ is the greater liberator, and His kingdom excels the best republic; for He yielded His arms to bonds to earn everlasting liberty for our souls. Let us be up to build His kingdom, and to His honor let us live as quiet and peaceable citizens. AMEN.

XXIV. SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

TEXT: While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead : but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live. And Jesus arose, and followed him, and so did his disciples. And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment : for she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole. But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort ; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour. And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise, he said unto them, Give place ; for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn. But when the people were put forth, he went in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose. And the fame hereof went abroad into all that land.—Matt. 9, 18–26.

Justification and salvation, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by grace through faith in Christ Jesus, this is the doctrine which, under the guidance of God, Dr. Martin Luther again began to teach in the darkness of popery. The great question between Luther and the Papists was: Is it by works, or is it by faith? and gloriously and triumphantly did Luther maintain and prove from the Scriptures that it is alone by faith, and not at all by works. But alas! after the lapse of a few centuries, the great mass of so-called Protestants, and among them many who are called by Luther's name, have again fallen away from this cardinal principle of the reformation. From hundreds of pulpits in all denominations you can now hear the doctrine preached: Faith alone would be of no avail, but faith and works must go together and each must do its part unto justification, which is directly denying salvation by faith alone. Yea, it has come to this pass among Protestants that those who are in real earnest about teaching salvation by faith alone are decried as people devoid of true and living religion.

Why is it that so many who want to be Christians can so belittle the doctrine of faith, or even denounce it as begetting only a formal kind of religion, without spirit and life in it? The chief reason is, because they do not know what the Scriptures mean by faith. They imagine faith nothing more than to think a thing true. If, indeed, faith were nothing more, then it would be nothing and could do nothing; for the devil also believes that the Bible is true. Faith is more than simply to account it true that Jesus Christ died; faith sees in His death the ransom of the soul from sin. Faith does not only think it true that Jesus Christ bare the sins of the world; faith causes my heart and soul to rest at peace in this assurance: Because Christ bare my sins, therefore I need not bear them. Faith makes the heart certain that, because Jesus Christ died and rose again, therefore righteousness, life and salvation are mine in spite of law, sin, death and all the gates of hell. By faith my soul claims the life of Christ, the suffering of Christ, the death of Christ, all the merits of Christ for its perpetual possession and says: These things are mine, and in them I will stand before God and will live forever.

This is what the Bible means by faith, whenever it speaks of justifying and saving faith, and therefore the Bible makes faith the vessel holding the whole treasure of God's spiritual gifts. Very distinctly does the Bible ascribe salvation to faith, and damnation to unbelief or the lack of faith. Thus, for instance, it is said, John 3, 36: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him," and taking leave of His disciples the Lord said: "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned." Mark 16, 16. Since faith saves, it is no wonder that the Scriptures ascribe to faith the overcoming of all enemies and all evils, as Paul writes: "Take the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked," Ep. 6, 16, and John says: "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." 1 Ep. 5, 4. In our text the Lord says to this woman: "*Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made*

thee whole." If she had touched Him without faith, she would not have been healed. It was her faith that brought about this divine miracle. Who hath eyes to see and should not see that the Scriptures make faith a divine thing, an almighty power? Surely, all who can speak scornfully of faith are blind and know not the Scriptures.

HOW CAN FAITH DO SUCH GREAT THINGS?

- I. Because faith sets aside all human and earthly help.
- II. Because faith has its help alone in God.

I.

We have heard that faith saves, overcomes all evils, repulses Satan, triumphs over temptations, obtains all good gifts from God, and brings into the inheritance of the saints in light. The question before us is: How can faith do these great things? To see this clearly we must bear in mind that faith does not obtain its power from man himself. It is evident, if faith would derive its power from man, then it could have only human power and could do nothing more than a man can naturally do. And so it indeed is with the faith of many. They have only a human faith, a faith of their own make, and therefore a powerless thing which gives no strength to overcome sin and the world. Of this kind of faith Dr. Luther says in his Preface to Paul's epistle to the Romans: "When they hear the Gospel they go to and by their own powers they make unto themselves a thought in the heart which says: I believe. This they take for the right faith. But it is a human fabric and opinion, of which the heart's deep ground knows nothing and it is powerless to effect a new life." Deluded souls who rest content with a self-made faith, which is nothing but a mere opinion, an uncertain idea, bringing neither assurance nor certainty to the heart.

This same class of people are apt to think themselves in possession of God's favor for this very reason, because they perform this act of believing on Jesus Christ. That is a very artful deceit of Satan; for while such persons can prate much about being saved by faith, their trust does in fact not stand on

Christ, but on what they do. It is a kind of faith which stands on man's own work and doing, or on the emotions and workings of the heart, and it cannot save. A quality of the true faith is that the believer has set aside all hope of help which might come from himself or other creatures. This is illustrated by two examples in our text.

This man, beseeching the Lord for his daughter, was a ruler of the synagogue, Jairus by name, and in all probability he, according to the doctrine of the Pharisees, depended for righteousness on his walking unblamably in the law, his giving tithes, doing alms, fasting, praying and the like. These things were his helps, but when his only daughter was at the point of death these helps forsook him. Now his unblamableness in the law could give him no comfort. Here neither sacrifices nor oblations, neither fasting nor giving of alms could help. He saw that nothing which he or others could do could save his daughter from dying. Even so this woman had consumed her fortune to find help and had experienced that doctors and medicines could not cure her. She had abandoned the hope of finding a medical remedy to help her. So both these persons saw that there was no earthly help for them, and they looked no more to themselves or other men and things for help. They turned to Christ as their last hope and only help.

So it is with the believer; he has given up seeking help in himself or with others. So long as a person thinks that he can help himself he has not the saving faith. The trust of self-righteous souls that by reforming their lives and doing works of piety and worship they could make up for their former sins and could render themselves fit for heaven is, indeed, a kind of faith; for such people believe in themselves and their own ability; but it is a faith which will not save. The woman in our text could not cure herself, neither could Jairus awaken his daughter from death, and if they would have believed this their faith would have been a vain thing. So long as faith trusts in a creature, or the works and doings of a creature, it is powerless to save, though that faith be ever so strong. Let the Catholic believe ever so firmly that hearing mass and calling on the saints

will promote his salvation, or let the Moralist be ever so firmly convinced that his morality will save him, it is all in vain.

Why can a faith which trusts in a creature, or the works of a creature, not save? Very simply because no creature can save the soul, as the Psalmist says: "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him." Ps. 49, 7. If a pillar is built on an immovable rock it cannot sink, but if built on quicksand, then the heavier and more massive it is the more certain will it be to sink. If faith trusts in a creature, or the works and doings of a creature, then it can have no power to save, because the foundation is perishable; and the more firmly a man, for example, believes that his works will save him, the more surely will that false and deceptive faith bring him down to destruction; for faith will be as the foundation on which it rests, and the Scriptures declare: "As many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse." Gal. 5, 10.

As long as man is in his natural, unconverted state, he will always have a deceptive faith, looking to that which cannot save, but when a man comes to the true Christian faith he quits looking for help to that which cannot help. As the woman in our text turned away from the doctors, saying within herself: These men can not help me, so the believer turns away from all creatures, saying: Be it man or angel, be it father or mother, be it law or works, piety or integrity, these can not save me. Paul, after saying that he was a Hebrew and a Pharisee, blameless in the law, adds: "I count all things but dung, that I may win Christ." Phil. 3, 8. This great truth, that faith sets aside all earthly and human helps, is beautifully expressed in these words of our Confessions: "Faith does not oppose to the wrath of God its own merits and works, which, at best, would be but as a feather against a tempest." The true believer has quit looking to things which, in the judgment day, must be blown away as a feather in a hurricane.

II.

Turning from that which can not help, faith is turned unto Him who can and does help. Jairus and this woman both

turned unto Christ as their last and only hope, and they both obtained from Christ what they sought. Especially remarkable was the faith of this woman; for she said: "*If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole.*" At first this woman had trusted in the skill of the doctors, but soon she had her misgivings and finally she lost all hope of being cured by the physicians. But now she heard of Jesus healing the sick, and she was filled with the certainty that He was the Deliverer come from God who was promised by the prophets. Therefore she had no doubt that He could and would help her; yea, she trusted, if she could but touch the hem of His garment she would be healed. When she came to Jesus He was surrounded by a multitude of people. Many touched His garments and nothing came of it, but when this woman touched the hem of His garment, virtue went out from Him, and He turned about, looking for her that touched Him. Her faith drew power from Him; for she was healed already before He spoke to her, and when He did speak He said: "*Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole.*"

How is this? Why was her faith such a power? The answer is contained in the words of the Lord which He spake unto the Jews, saying: "The scripture cannot be broken." John 10, 35. The very simple reason why this woman's faith was such a power is, because it was foretold by the prophets that Christ in the days of His flesh would heal the bodily sick from their infirmities. That promise this woman believed, and therefore her faith could not fail to draw healing power from the Lord, otherwise the words of the Scripture would have failed, and the Scriptures cannot be broken.

Here behold two qualities of faith, two things essentially necessary unto faith, without which there can be no true faith, and these two are: Confidence in Christ and confidence in Him because of His Word. Faith in Christ is confidence, trust in Him, reliance, dependence on Him for help and salvation. Faith is not doubt or scruple or uncertainty, it is confidence and certainty. This woman did not say: Perhaps this Jesus could and would help me, and though I cannot know this for certain

beforehand, yet I will try and see, whether He can and will do any thing for me. That would not have been the language of faith, but rather of doubt and unbelief. Faith says: This is so; this the Lord does do and will do. Faith says: I and all the world were lost in sin, but God has sent a Savior into the world, and He is my Savior who saves me from my sins, and who will deliver me from all evil and will receive me into His everlasting kingdom. So faith speaks. Paul says: "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Phil. 1, 21. He does not say: I think this is so, I hope it will turn out so; no, but he says: This thing *is* so; Christ *is* my life; death *is* my gain. Faith lays hold of Christ, saying: Thou art my salvation; I am lost, but Thou wilt save me.

This faith may be stronger or weaker. The believer's confidence in Christ is sometimes greater, sometimes smaller. His faith may be so sorely pressed by the fiery darts of Satan that it is rendered like unto a smoking flax so that the nauseous smoke threatens to suffocate the flickering flamelet, and he must sigh with David: "Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: bring my soul out of prison." Ps. 142, 6. But so long as faith continues to look to Jesus Christ for help and salvation it nevertheless remains a true and saving faith. Though faith looking to Christ be only like a spark glimmering in the ashes, yet it does infallibly obtain and possess all salvation. I say, faith in Christ the Savior infallibly opens heaven and brings salvation.

What is that, infallibly? Yes, I wish to emphasize this that faith in Christ brings salvation, and this cannot fail, never and in no case. Behold, Jesus Christ has come into the world to save sinners. Now if I look to Him and claim Him for my Savior, must I then not infallibly obtain and possess salvation? Why! if that could fail then the whole plan of salvation would be overthrown. God the Father sent Christ to save and He came to save, and if now I look for and expect salvation in Him and would not get it, then both the sending of the Father and the coming of the Son would be made void, and that cannot be. Because in Christ God has prepared salvation, therefore faith,

grasping this salvation, blots out sin, takes away the sting of death, closes the gates of hell and unlocks heaven, and these great and mighty things faith infallibly does, because it holds Him who is the salvation of God. What? faith should fail? I should hope in Christ and yet not possess salvation? Such a thing can not be; for then He would not be the salvation of God.

Of course, a man, after believing for a while, may throw away faith. Then he is again under the wrath of God and has nothing. But this sentence remains standing: Faith in Jesus Christ infallibly brings salvation. It is written: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Acts 16, 31. This word can not fail. Not a single one who clings to Jesus Christ with a lively trust of heart and soul can be lost. Hold to Jesus Christ and nothing in heaven, on earth or under the earth can prevent your salvation. As surely as no one can be saved who is not in Jesus Christ, even so and more surely must every one be saved who is in Jesus Christ, as it is written: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Rom. 8, 1. Dost thou believe in Jesus Christ? Does your soul say: Jesus, Thou art mine forever, dearer far than earth to me? Persevere in this faith, and when you come to die you will not be in uncertainty about the land beyond the river; you will know where your soul will go.

How can faith possess this great confidence and certainty? For the very simple reason, because it has and holds the Word, pledge and promise of God. Christ, for instance, says: "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." John 11, 25. Now if I believe that He is *the Life* and claim Him as *my life*, must I then not possess life? Surely I must, and this cannot fail, because Christ is the resurrection and the life. "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" Num. 23, 19. God is as good as His Word, and a faith holding His Word cannot be deceived.

The short answer to the question, why faith can do such great things? is, because it lays hold on the Word which Paul

calls "the power of God unto salvation," and because it holds Jesus Christ "who is over all, God blessed forever." The Word of the living God is able to do what it expresses. In his next chapter Matthew tells us, that the Lord once sent out His disciples two by two into the cities of Israel, commanding them: "Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give." They had the Word to go and perform miracles; in the strength of this Word they went forth and they "returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name." Luke 10, 17. I have not the Word to go and to heal the sick, and not having a word of God for it I cannot have the faith to do it. But I have the command to go and to preach Christ crucified, who is the ransom for your souls, and to "pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." 2 Cor. 5, 20. If I had the command to say unto the Blue Ridge: Cast thyself into the sea, I could verily do it. Now I have the command to preach unto you, that you are justified freely by the grace of God through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, and every one of you who receives this Word in an abiding faith shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life. Let us therefore not cast away our confidence, but let us be careful to remember what the Epistle to the Hebrews, chapter 10th, says: "The just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." AMEN.

XXV. SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

TEXT : When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand :) then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains : let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house : neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days ? But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day : for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved : but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened. Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there ; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders ; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore, if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert : go not forth : behold he is in the secret chambers ; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west ; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.—Matt. 24, 15-28.

Since the world began God has observed this order that He forewarns men of the punishment of sin and His impending judgments. This is a great mercy of God, because in this wise time and space for repentance is granted unto men, and it is His desire that men should turn unto Him, that His retributions might be averted, or mitigated, or at least, that those who do turn unto Him should escape the coming wrath. Those also who will not repent are rendered without excuse, having been forewarned of the destruction coming upon them. To the first world God granted one hundred and twenty years, but it repented not and perished in the flood. Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh in the name of the Lord, asking that he should let Israel go, otherwise great calamity would come upon him and his people. If Pharaoh had heeded the warning, both he and

Egypt would have been spared, but he hardened his heart and said: "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go." Ex. 5, 2. Yet the Lord had forbearance with Pharaoh and sent Moses and Aaron to him over and again with the same warning, but he persisted in his perverse mind until his carcass sank down to the bottom of the sea. Jonah was sent to that great city Nineveh whose wickedness had come up before the Lord, and he preached: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown," but the king and the people repented in sackcloth and ashes, and Nineveh was spared.

A great mercy of God that He forewarns men of His coming judgments. Knowing that a certain thing is coming, man can apply himself to avert it or to escape it, and that men should so do is the object of God in His warnings. To this St. Peter bears witness when he writes: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." 2 Ep. 3, 9. This is God's purpose, with this end in view He plans His providential dealings that men should repent and should not perish. And because they have been forewarned, therefore when sudden destruction comes upon the wicked, they are compelled to acknowledge that God is righteous and His judgments are just. Of that stiff-necked generation of the Jews who would no more repent the Lord said: "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin." John 15, 22. The Lord warned them, their city would be destroyed and the kingdom of God would be taken from them, but they made light of His warning and, instead of repenting, they made His warning a cause of accusation against Him to put Him to death.

Now we are forewarned in the Word of God that a day is coming in which every man will be judged according to his works, and if we heed not this warning, then, verily, twofold destruction must fall upon our heads. The inhabitants of Jerusalem should therefore be a warning example unto us, persuading us to take heed and not to walk in their footprints, but

to seek the Lord while He may be found and to make haste to flee from the wrath to come. Allow me therefore to speak on:

THE LORD'S COMMAND TO FLEE FROM JERUSALEM AN EXHORTATION TO US TO FLEE FROM THE WRATH TO COME.

Now the Lord instructed the disciples

- I. When and how they should flee; and
- II. By what they should be guided in their flight.

I.

When the Lord was once going out of the temple and the disciples called His attention to the magnificence of the building He said, the time was coming, when not one stone of it would be left upon another. Thereafter, when He was sitting on Mount Olive opposite the temple and the disciples asked: "When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" He preached them a long sermon on the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world. Of that sermon this Gospel is a part. It treats both of the destruction of Jerusalem and of the world's end. But as the destruction of Jerusalem is an illustration of the end of the world, therefore all here said may be applied to the last times of this world. The abomination of desolation as it was in the land of Judah, is an image of the abomination of desolation in the last days; the tribulation of those days in Judea represents the tribulation of the latter days; the seductions of those days picture the seductions before the end of the world. In this wise all here said of Jerusalem may be applied to the present and the coming days, to do which is indeed a highly edifying meditation. But let us hear the text in its literal meaning.

"When ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand.)" What was this abomination of desolation? Some say, it was the destruction of the city and the temple, but this ill agrees with the text, because the Lord here commands the disciples, when they would see the abomination

of desolation they should hastily flee, but when the city was already being destroyed it was too late for flight. Some have thought it idols placed in the temple, but history does not record that idols were placed in the temple at that time. The emperor Cajus did command that his statue should be set up in the temple for worship, but owing to the stubborn opposition of the Jews it was not done. The Lord Himself directs us to the prophecy of Daniel, who in the 9th chapter says: "The people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood." And again he says: "For the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation." In a marginal note you will find these latter words rendered thus: "And upon the battlements shall be the idols of the desolator." Daniel clearly foretold, a mighty ruler would come to destroy the city and the sanctuary, and this destroyer would come upon them like a flood suddenly and swiftly. Therefore this "*abomination of desolation*" was the Roman general with his army; for that heathenish army with its idols was indeed an abomination to the Jews, and it was an abomination of desolation; for it made desolate the city and all the land of Judea. The Lord, therefore, here means to tell the disciples, if they would see an idolatrous and bloodthirsty army enter the Holy Land, march against the holy city and destroy every thing before it, then they should understand that the destruction of the city, the temple and the people was at hand. That this is the Lord's meaning is established by the Gospel of Luke, where the Lord says: "When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh." Ch. 21, 20.

In this same sentence the Lord tells, what the disciples who would then be in Jerusalem and Judea should do: "*Then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains.*" With these words the Lord indicates, then would have come the desolation of the city and the whole country. In olden time God had often protected Jerusalem most wonderfully. When it appeared that the city must become a prey to the enemy, the Lord showed that Jerusalem was the apple of His eye, and the most powerful

armies were powerless against it. But now the Lord did no more say, His faithful followers should stay and should cry to God and He would defend them. Now the Lord commanded flight as the only means to escape the tribulation of those days. That people had filled the measure of wrath full to the brim, and to deliver His own from the destruction which could be delayed no longer, the Lord bade them to flee, not only out of Jerusalem, but out of the country, because in the whole land there would be no safety. That the Lord here says, they should flee to the mountains does not imply that they would not be allowed to go elsewhere. In times of danger mountains afford the most secure hiding places and, therefore, the expression to flee to the mountains means in general to flee to a place of safety. This command of the Lord the Christians at Jerusalem kept in memory, and when the Jewish war commenced they emigrated to the east of Jordan and there, in a mountain village called Pella, they dwelt in peace for many years.

How they should flee the Lord also describes: "*Let him which is on the house top not come down to take anything out of his house: neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes.*" The houses of the Jews had flat roofs, and they were accustomed to spend much of their time on the roof. Now those who would be on the housetop, when the enemy would approach, should not tarry in the house to gather up their treasures and to pack their goods, they should flee straightway; and those who would be in the field, though having nothing which is needed on a long journey, yet they should not return to their house to provide themselves with food and raiment, they should forthwith start to make their escape from the land. Why so sudden and hasty a flight? Because the Roman armies came like a whirlwind and for those that tarried there was no escape. Therefore the Lord here exclaims: "*And wo unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!*" This is not a wo like that pronounced on the scribes and Pharisees; that was a wo of wrath, but this is a wo of compassion. The Lord pities these women, because they would not be able to flee so suddenly, and would be obliged to remain. The Lord

yet adds: "*But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day.*" The Lord did not tell them to pray that the tribulation should be averted; prayer could no more stay the wrath, because that people's measure of sin was full; but for this they were to pray that their flight occur not in winter, because then it might be hindered by the inclemency of the season; and not on the Sabbath, because on that day the gates of the cities were closed making egress difficult, and because one fleeing on the Sabbath was liable to be apprehended as a Sabbath-breaker. They were to pray that their flight come not to pass at an unfavorable time when it might be hindered and perhaps prevented, but at a favorable time, that they might make sure their escape.

Why did the Lord so urgently bid the disciples to flee and so minutely describe, how and when they should flee? He Himself gives the reason, saying: "*For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.*" There was to be such misery and distress in Jerusalem, as never had been on earth since the world began, and as never will be any more until the stars shall drop from the heavens. Josephus, an eye-witness of those woe-filled days, in his history of the Jewish war writes: "If all the misery since the creation of the world be compared with the misery of the Jews, I do not doubt that the misery which befell the Jews is by far the greatest."

These are remarkable words; for Josephus was not a Christian, but he describes the calamity of the Jews almost with the very words with which Christ had predicted it forty years before it came to pass. Nations have perished from the earth, but no other nation ever knew such heartrending misery as that which befell the Jews. The Lord gives the reason for this, saying: "That servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more." Luke 12, 47. To the Jews much was given. "He sheweth his word unto

Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments they have not known them," and then the Psalmist adds: "Praise ye the Lord." Ps. 147, 19. Of old they did praise the Lord. The Israelites were once a noble nation, a praise unto the Lord; but they degenerated, they began to kill His prophets, and when He sent them His Son they thrust Him out of their city. So God thrust them out of His sanctuary that they should be His people no more, and He beat them with many stripes, more than any nation before or after.

We know that a great and dreadful day is coming, the day when God will judge the world in righteousness, and that day must be drawing on, because the signs are fulfilled and the world is ripe for the harvest. And though we die before that day, yet we know that, as man dies, so he must appear before the judgment-seat of Christ. Neither is the time hidden from us when we are to flee from the wrath to come; for thus says the Lord: "I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee; behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." 2 Cor. 6, 2. Now, while you live upon earth, is the time to escape from the kingdom of darkness to the mountains of salvation in Jesus Christ. *Now* turn from sin and the world; *now* seek safety under the cross of Christ, and be not tardy in so doing, lest while you tarry destruction be upon you.

And we, who are called Lutherans, have special reason to lay to heart the words of the Lord in this text. Unto us, too, much is given. We must indeed speak similar as the Psalmist did of Israel: The Lord has shown us His Word, He has given us His statutes, He has granted us the full and pure truth of His Gospel; so has He, in these latter days of the world, not dealt with any others, save alone with our Evangelical Lutheran Zion. Unto others He has granted rivulets of His truth, but unto us the full limpid stream. And since He has so dealt with us when we deserved it not and were not worthy of it, let us prepare ourselves to meet Him, lest the judgment be pronounced upon us, that we must be beaten with many stripes.

Concerning the destruction of Jerusalem the Lord goes on to say: "*And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.*" Those days, for the Jews so terrible, were shortened; the whole war did not last long; and this was done not for the sake of the wicked, but for the elect's sake. How are we to understand this? History gives a plain commentary. The Jews have remained a wicked nation unto this day. They have the Scriptures of the prophets, they have all the means to know the true Messiah, yet they hate Christ with such bitter hatred that they will not even pronounce His name. But even at the destruction of Jerusalem there were doubtless some living who thereafter were converted unto Christ, and since that time many individual souls out of Israel have come to the knowledge of Christ and have been saved. For the sake of these elect ones the days of that tribulation were shortened, otherwise no one out of Israel could have been saved any more, because, if the war had lasted longer, all the Jews would have perished and there would no more be a house of Israel out of which a remnant could be saved. Behold the faithfulness, the unspeakable mercy of the Lord! That nation which had slain the Son of God, which despised the multitude of signs and miracles which were performed in its midst, which cursed the Gospel of its own Messiah as a damnable heresy, which persecuted the servants of the Lord unto the death; that nation had surely deserved that it be extirpated from the face of the earth with root, stem and branches, yet for the sake of the little remnant out of Israel which would yet hear His voice and come to Him, for their sake God spared that evil generation. What greater testimony for the grace and mercy of God could we desire?

Are you sometimes afraid the Lord might cut you off? He might cast you away? Do you sometimes tremble for your salvation, thinking: Should the Lord receive such an one as I am? If the devil and the flesh awaken such thoughts within you, call to remembrance the words: "*For the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.*" What does this mean? It certainly

means, God still had in Israel a little remnant of such who would hear the voice of His Son and would love His Gospel, and for the sake of these He spared the murderers of His Son and refrained from totally cutting off the most wicked generation on earth. How dearly, how tenderly must He love them that love Him, since His love to them sets bounds to His wrath against the wicked! And do you fear that this God might cast you away, you who love His Word, who call on His name, who desire to be His own? Do you think that God who spared that generation of vipers, because a few would yet be born of it who would fear Him, do you think *that* God could cast any single one away who comes to Him hungering and thirsting after righteousness? I tell you, sooner than to cast one single soul away that loves His word, sooner would He spare the whole wicked world. Hold it up to Satan, if he would vex you with thoughts of perhaps being a castaway.

II.

Applying ourselves to flee from the wrath to come we must set about it wisely to make our escape sure. The Christians at Jerusalem were to be governed by the words of the Lord recorded in this text. By these words they knew that they were not out of danger when they had passed out of the city gates. The Lord had bidden them flee to the mountains and to the mountains east of Jordan was a long way, beset with many dangers; for the country was overrun by robbers, and both Jews and Romans were their enemies. To escape those Christians had to be swift and wise.

It is not enough, if we have become Christians, we must also remain Christians and in our pilgrimage to our heavenly Pella we must walk circumspectly as wise. Spiritually we are beset by the very dangers of which the Lord here speaks, and He says: "*Whoso readeth, let him understand.*" Now, too, there is an abomination of desolation standing in the holy place. From many a pulpit doctrines are preached which must undermine all faith and promote infidelity. The world is brought into the Church and Legion is the name of those who say that

they are Christians and walk like worldlings; and Christendom is rent into many sects each crying: Here is Christ; here is the right way. What shall we make our light to guide us when seductions are so strong, that we may not fall into ambush or be seduced to err from the way? There is only one trusty guide, the Word of Him who speaks to us in this text. And there is here a precious word which it is well to call to mind often. It is the word: "*Behold, I have told you before.*"

Jesus Christ told us the things which belong to our salvation, and He foretold many things which should come to pass in the last days. Have these things come to pass? They have. He said: "*Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there: believe it not. If they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not.*" They did say: You shall find Him in the desert, and many thousands went to become hermits and to build their lonely hut in desolate places. They do say: To find Christ you must go to a convent and must dwell in a cell. These things were fulfilled long ago, but it was reserved for the nineteenth century to witness the literal fulfillment of the words: "*There shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.*" Not until the century which has just ended did men arise who set up the claim of being Jesus Christ personally and bodily returned into the flesh, and that these false Christs pretend to perform miracles as great and greater than those of Christ is necessarily implied in their very pretense. These things I can see with my eyes and can hear them with my ears, and by them I know that the words of Jesus Christ are words of divine truth; for God alone can know the future. In the Word let us abide. It affords a safe anchor. And the more delusions multiply the more let us bear in mind the concluding words of this text: "*As the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.*"

On these remarkable words Dr. Luther makes this remark: "*Wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together,*" that is, ye need not ask, where the place is to which Christ will come. Wherever I may be we will certainly meet together, as the saying is: Where the carcass is, there the eagles gather. As the eagles do not map out a way where to fly, but gather where the carrion is, so my own will be gathered to me. Where I am there my elect will also be." (See Gospel postil on this text.)

As proverbs generally may be applied in various ways, so this proverb admits of two applications. The one application runs in this wise: The Lord's coming like a flash of lightning is His coming to judgment. The carcass are the wicked who live and die in sin. The eagles gathered upon them are the angels, who will cast them into a lake of fire burning with brimstone as food for the devils. The wicked are as a carcass before God, as Paul writes to the Ephesians: "Ye were dead in trespasses and sins." And as carrion attracts the eagles, so sin draws the punishment of God upon individuals and whole nations. As surely as the vultures will find out the decaying body of an animal, so surely will the punishment find out the sinner. Though sin be committed in secret under cover of darkness, the God of heaven will see it and will seek it.

What the wicked will be at the end of days the Lord describes in the concluding words of Isaiah, saying: "They shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die; neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh." When the light of the Lord's coming will flash from the east to the west then the wicked and unbelieving will be transformed altogether into the image of the Old Serpent, the angels and the saints will turn from them with abhorrence, and the devils will fall upon them like vultures upon their prey. Behold here your doom pictured, you who live in sin and put off repentance from day to day and from year to year. When you yield up your soul it becomes the revolting food of the vultures from below. O therefore give ear to the voice of

the apostle, crying out: "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." Eph. 5, 14. Long enough have you surrendered your members to be weapons of unrighteousness from one shame to another. Let your soul arise and flee to the clefts of the Rock of Ages, where alone it is safe.

This is the other application which is made of this proverb: The carcass is made to signify Christ and the eagles gathering are the souls who are eager to hear the Word of Christ. This is the application which Luther makes, as we have already heard, and it is truly evangelical and highly comforting. As eagles come for their food from far distant mountains, so are hungry souls gathered to Jesus Christ from the ends of the earth; for this is His desire to be the food of the soul, and He has declared: "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day." John 6, 54. Oh that the hunger of my soul were like the hunger of a bird of prey on a bleak winter day, that my heart would be continually yearning to be more perfectly filled with the love of Jesus.

Lord, for Thee I ever sigh,
Nothing else can satisfy ;
Ever do I cry to Thee :
Jesus, Jesus, come to me. AMEN.

XXVI. SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

TEXT: When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory : and before him shall be gathered all nations : and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats : and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world : for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat : I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink : I was a stranger, and ye took me in : naked, and ye clothed me : I was sick, and ye visited me : I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee ? or thirsty, and gave thee drink ? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in ? or naked, and clothed thee ? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee ? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels : for I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat : I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink : I was a stranger, and ye took me not in : naked, and ye clothed me not : sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee ? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment : but the righteous into life eternal.—Matt. 25, 31-46.

Both in ancient and modern times there have been such who deny the existence of God, and with it the coming of a general and final judgment of the world. David speaks of them in this wise: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works." Ps. 14, 1. And of our modern times St. Peter writes: "There shall come

in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." 2 Ep. 3, 3. These scoffers have come in multitudes; they have stepped on the broad of the earth and they speak proud words, claiming to be marching in the front ranks of progress, as the most enlightened of these enlightened days. Some are outspoken infidels, professing to believe in no hereafter, some call themselves by the genteel name of Agnostics, professing not to know, but they are all actuated by the same spirit.

Be not deceived by their proud words and high-sounding names which are hollow pretenses. Even of the heathen St. Paul writes, that they "are a law unto themselves which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing, or else excusing one another." Rom. 2, 14. What the lips of the scoffer profess his own heart does not believe. The voice of conscience may be smothered for a time, but no man can so change his being as to render himself altogether without any conscience. Hence no man can fully and permanently persuade himself that he will die like a beast, and there will be no hereafter, and no judgment. The consciousness that he will be made responsible for the deeds done in the body is increate in man and it cannot be wiped out.

The profession of the infidel does not proceed from conviction, but the wish is father of the thought. Man having a guilty conscience must dread the judgment and wishes there were none. But all such wishes are idle and the philosophy of infidelity is folly; for God has appointed the day of judgment and it will surely come. "God," says Solomon, "shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." Eccles. 12, 14. Not only do the Scriptures at innumerable places emphasize the fact that the judgment is coming, they also describe, how it will be held. Such a description is contained in the text before us. Let us accordingly consider:

THE MANNER OF PROCEDURE AT THE FINAL
JUDGMENT OF THE WORLD.

- I. The Preparation;
- II. The Separation;
- III. The Sentence.

I.

The conscience of man bears witness to the fact that a judgment is coming, whence also the heathen know it; but how the judgment will be held we can know only from the Word of God's revelation, the holy Scriptures. And the longest and plainest description which the Lord has given us of the mode of procedure at that judgment is comprised in our text. First the Lord here tells us who the Judge will be, and how he will come, saying: "*When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory.*" The triune God will institute the judgment, but He will execute it through Christ, the God-man. St. Paul distinctly affirms this, saying: "God hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained." Acts 17, 31. This Man who is ordained by God to judge the world is Jesus Christ, and the reason why God appointed Him the Judge, the Lord Himself gives when He says: "The Father hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man." John 5, 27. Because the Son became man and redeemed the world, therefore He is appointed Judge of the world. Because He took upon Him the form of a servant and humbled Himself so far as to become the bearer of our sins and to be accused, judged and condemned innocently, thereby to deliver us from the judgment of condemnation; therefore the Father ordained Him Judge of the world, that He should wind up the affairs of this world, should deliver those who are looking for Him out of sin and judgment, and that the unbelievers should see whom they despised. For this reason He here calls Himself "*the Son of man,*" showing that the same who redeemed the world will also judge the world.

The Judge will “*come in his glory,*” and will “*sit upon the throne of his glory.*” What that glory will be, and what the throne of His glory is we can now not know or even imagine. Certain it is that He will come in the glory with which the Father has glorified Him, and He will sit on the throne of omnipotence, omniscience and majesty. Not as though He would then for the first time seat Himself on this throne; He is even now sitting at the right hand of God having power over all things; but the world does not believe this, because it does not see Him sitting there; but then the world will be obliged to believe, because He will manifest Himself as the Judge before the eyes of all. Likewise, when the Lord says that He will “*COME,*” we must not imagine that He is now locally inclosed in the heavens, or is dwelling in some far away luminary and is not here; we know that He is with us daily, numbering all our tears.

We must therefore not picture His coming to the mind as being like unto the approach of a comet. The great comet of the year 1860 first appeared as a mere speck in the distance scarcely perceptible to the eye, and it became brighter and brighter as it approached nearer to the earth until it stood out in the firmament a great and luminous body with a flowing train of light, the admiration of the wise and the terror of the superstitious. The Lord will not first appear dimly in the distance to approach nearer and nearer with a train of shining spirits following Him, but “*as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*” Matt. 24, 27. And how should it not? He need not make a long journey coming nearer and nearer, He is here already, and when the time of judgment will have come He will suddenly show Himself visibly “*and all the holy angels with him.*” As the angels were with Him in the days of His flesh and accompanied Him when He ascended on high, so they will also be with Him in the judgment. This, therefore, is the scene which will present itself to the view of men: Jesus Christ, the ordained Judge, will come in the clouds of heaven, crowned with that glory which He had with the Father before

ever the world began, surrounded by the cherubim and seraphim, the thrones and potentates in celestial beauty and brightness. That will be glory as the world never beheld, when the windows of heaven will be opened and all the glory of God will appear.

Immediately after the Lord's appearing the summoning to the judgment will follow. "*And before him shall be gathered all nations.*" He will be visible not at one place only, all inhabitants of the earth's circle will see Him wherever they may dwell. Nor will only those see Him who will then be living, all that ever did live on the earth will see Him. A trumpet will give forth a mighty sound and will wake the dead. From the snowy plains of the north, from Arabian sands, from the bottom of the great deep will the dead arise and come forth. Then will the Judge send His angels to the four winds of the earth and they will bring unto His judgment seat the offspring of Adam, both man and woman both great and small. The righteous will come rejoicing and the unrighteous, though unwilling, will be driven to the judgment, and no one will be strong enough to resist, neither will any hide himself secretly; for He who numbers the hairs of our head knows where each may be found.

Then will traffic cease in the market and the goods will drop from the hand of the crier. Then will the land-grabber relinquish his domain and the miser be dragged from his money bag. Then will the gossip of the tale-bearer die on his lips and the adulterer will suddenly find himself exposed to the light. Then will the theatres be deserted and the song of the drunken will stop in the tavern. Then will the sigh of the disconsolate soul be turned into song and the tears of the forlorn will be dried. All must appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, the good and the bad, the mother and the infant which she murdered before it was born. The angels will wing their way over the earth, and they will gather the elect out of the four winds, and they will bring together "all things that offend, and them which do iniquity." Matt. 13, 41. They that heard the Gospel and they that did not hear it; they that loved the Word of God and they that despised it, they will all be there. Unto

this Paul bears witness writing to the Romans: "There is no respect of persons with God. For as many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law, in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men." Ch. 2, 11. Though the wicked in sudden despair call on the rocks to fall on them and the mountains to hide them, the rocks and the mountains will vanish away and will leave them exposed to the judgment.

II.

When all nations will have been gathered before the judge He will assort them: "*And he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.*" This separation will be the decisive act of the judgment; for the right is the place of honor, the left the place of dishonor. Now the Lord suffers wheat and tares to grow together. Now true and sham Christians worship at the same altar, righteous and unrighteous dwell under the same roof, godly and ungodly eat at the same table and sleep in the same bed; but when the time of harvest will have arrived, then He will separate the wheat from the tares. Neither will it be a difficult task for Him. Easily as a shepherd distinguishes the sheep and the goats, even so easily will the Lord distinguish the righteous and the unrighteous. "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his." 2 Tim. 2, 19. He is the head and knows His members, His eyes behold the faith or the unbelief of the heart from afar off, and He will be in no embarrassment to select those who heard His voice and followed Him.

Then wonderful separations will transpire. Husband and wife, brother and sister, father and son will part to meet no more. Many great ones of the earth to whom men bowed with reverence, many hypocrites whose deceptive piety was highly lauded, will find their station with the goats, and many who were despised on earth and were pronounced fools will be numbered with the sheep. O how will the righteous rejoice, seeing themselves separated from the ungodly! With thanks-

giving will they remember that once they had to experience the truth of the Lord's word: "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake," Mat. 10, 22; that they were in the world as strangers and aliens and were treated by the world as foreigners, but now are separated from the "crooked and perverse nation," Phil 2, 15, of those who tempted and taunted them. But the others will behold with terror the children of light departing from their ranks, and the ungodly and unbelieving left to stand alone.

My friend, where will you stand? What is the testimony of your conscience? Do you belong to the right or to the left? The Judge does not make three or four, He makes only two companies. You will belong to one of them. Those who have been born upon earth must appear before the Lord, and must go either to the right or to the left.

By what shall I know where my station will be? The Judge will look to see, whether you are a sheep or a goat, and He will assign you your station accordingly. Consider well the comparison which the Lord here makes. Those on the right He calls sheep, those on the left goats. The sheep is an humble, inoffensive, cleanly and useful animal. The goat is an unclean animal of vicious habits, having an evil odor about it and ready to use its horns. Do you depend on riches and power, walking in pride and ready to run over the poor and defenseless? Do you seek after carnal pleasures? Do you live in fornication and unchaste habits? Do you not detest gluttony and drunkenness? Is it your heart's joy to rake in filthy lucre? These and like things are an evil odor in the nostrils of the Judge, and those with whom He finds this odor He classes with the goats.

Is this a true description of your sentiment and manner of life? O consider! if you live as a goat you will die as a goat and will be numbered with the goats. Let not the time pass away unimproved. Put not the Word of God from you, but hasten to put away goat's habits and cry unto the Lord to have mercy on you, to wash you from your sins, to make you a sheep and to receive you into His own fold. Let not your heart be entangled in the newfangled idea of a second probation. This

text knows nothing of a chance to change after death. When the Judge appears the goats can no more be made sheep, neither can the sheep become goats any more, the Judge takes them as He finds them, and He stations the sheep on His right, because He desires to honor them, and the goats on His left; for they that despise Him "shall be lightly esteemed." 1 Sam. 2, 30.

III.

The separation completed, the Judge pronounces the sentence on each party and publicly gives reason and argument that His judgment is right and just. Here something seems to be lacking in the procedure; for after the separation the pronouncing of the sentence immediately follows. In human courts the witnesses must be examined, the defense of the accused must be heard and only after all the facts obtainable have been elicited can the judge proceed to pronounce the sentence. Among men he is justly pronounced an unjust judge who will pass judgment without hearing the reasons for and against. But this Judge gathers together the nations, divides them into two parts and without an examination passes judgment. How can He justly do so?

A human judge must institute an examination in order to become acquainted with the facts in the case; but why should the Judge of the world institute any examination concerning things which are far better known to Him than to men themselves? Why should He question me concerning my doings on earth, when all my works are manifest unto Him, when all my words are registered before Him and none of my thoughts are hidden from Him? He is able to hold up to us what you and I have long since forgotten. His memory deceives Him not, neither can He err in any thing. He does not stand in need of summoning witnesses, although witnesses will not be lacking. The holy angels, our own conscience and the friends which the righteous make unto themselves with the mammon of unrighteousness, all these will bear testimony that His judgment is just. The condemned, too, know it, and their attempting a defense proceeds only from impotent desperation.

First the Judge will turn to those on His right hand; for He will much rather bless than curse, and will say unto them: "*Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*" O, those are words which will beatify the righteous, filling them with indescribable joy. Come, my sheep to your shepherd, my disciples to your master, my brothers and sisters to your brother, my bride to your groom. Come, from darkness to light, from the stormy seas to the still haven, from the battle to triumph, from labor to rest, from servitude to liberty, from the community of the evil to the society of the angels, from earth to heaven, from death to life, from shame to everlasting glory. The Lord says: Ye have heard the Word of my promise upon earth and have believed it, now hear also the word: Come, and receive what ye believed. Ye confessed me upon earth before men; ye were not ashamed of my cross; behold, now I confess you before the nations; come, I will honor you before my Father. Ye longed for me as the bride longs for the groom; oft ye sighed: Come, Lord Jesus, now am I come to fulfill your longing and to take you home. Not seeing, ye believed; arise now and come; ye shall see what ye believed. "*Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*" He does not say: Receive your reward, nor simply: enter ye in; He says: "*Inherit,*" as though He would say: This kingdom was prepared for you from the beginning; for you I purchased it with my blood, and because through faith ye are become my brothers and sisters you have a right of inheritance in this kingdom; it is yours, not as a loan which must be surrendered up again, it is your everlasting possession. Neither shall ye have a portion thereof only; the whole kingdom, all bliss, all glory of the heavens shall be yours; the righteousness of the saints, the robes of white silk, the unfading crowns, the tree of life bearing twelve kinds of fruit, the temple of the living God, the harps of praise: come, take it into possession, it is your inheritance which can be taken from you no more. My tongue lacks skill worthily to exalt the words. Let me repeat them in their native beauty: "*Then shall the King say unto them on*

his right hand, *Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*"

The Lord adds reason for His judgment, saying: "*For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.*" But those who will stand at the right are of great simplicity and humility; they are surprised that they should have done these things unto the Lord; therefore they answer and say: "*Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?*" They are not aware of having done any such things to the Lord personally, and as to their good works in general, they laid so little store by them as to have forgotten them. But the Lord says: "*Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*" Behold, how intimately He connects Himself with His people; what has been done unto a Christian He accounts as done unto Himself. Do you wish to know, how you may do service unto Jesus Christ? Do good unto your fellow Christians, and it will be accounted as done unto Him.

Turning to those on His left the Judge will say: "*Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.*" A terrible word! He says: Depart from Me, the Fountain of all blessing, to Satan the author of all misery; depart from light into darkness, from joy into sorrow, from earth into everlasting fire, which was prepared only for the fallen angels, but into which ye are also cast, because ye refused my salvation. Ye despised my Word upon earth, therefore ye shall be despised forever; ye did no good unto me on earth, therefore you can now expect nothing good from me: "*For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.*" They indeed seek to justify themselves, plead-

ing that they never had occasion to do good unto the Lord personally, but He answers: "*Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least, ye did it not to me.*" What is not done to the members is certainly not done to the Head. They who will not do good to the members of Christ on earth, will be found as having done no service unto the Lord.

Is then this text against the doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone? Indeed not, but it powerfully confirms that doctrine. Giving the reason why He pronounces some blessed and others cursed, the Lord says not a syllable of faith; in both cases He only enumerates works. Will He judge according to works? So this text clearly reads, and St. Paul writes: "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." 2 Cor. 5, 10. But judging according to works, the Lord will not judge according to the *merit* of works, as this text very clearly shows; for to the righteous the Lord does not say: Come, receive the reward of your works, He says: "*Come, inherit the kingdom.*" Hence it is not a merited reward, but an inheritance, and this inheritance is not obtained by works, but alone through faith in Christ Jesus, whereby we are made His brothers and sisters, and hence joint heirs with Him. Now they that are heirs become heirs not by their works, but by birth. A man does not give his fortune to his servant who has worked for him, but to his son who is born of him. That therefore which ultimately decides in the judgment is faith or unbelief, as the Lord clearly says: "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned." Mark 16, 16.

Why then does the Lord enumerate works only and these all works of charity towards our fellow men? Simply because the fleece shows the nature of the animal. We say: This animal has wool, it is a sheep; that animal has no wool, it is not a sheep. The wool does not make it a sheep, but it shows that it is a sheep. It is born a sheep and therefore it grows wool. The true faith does and will work by love. If our faith does not

constrain us to do good unto the members of Christ on earth, and to do it without seeking reward of merit or honor with men, then we have not the living, true and saving faith. Therefore the Lord does also not recount to the condemned the evil deeds which they have done; He does not say, depart, ye murderers, fornicators, drunkards, slanderers; He merely mentions things which they did not do, and this is sufficient proof of their unbelief. It is not at all necessary for a man to be a liar or a thief to show his unbelief; if he will not do good to the members of Christ when he has the ability and occasion to do so, that is conclusive proof that the true faith is not in him; for faith is such a power in the soul that it will make the limbs of the body active in works of charity. Building our hope of salvation alone on Christ who is alone our Savior, let us not forget that true faith worketh by love, and let us gird our loins to follow in the footprints of our Master, and to walk in works which need not dread the light of the Lord's coming. AMEN.

XXVII. SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

TEXT : Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them ; but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh ; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil ; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so ; lest there be not enough for us and you : but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came ; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage : and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.—Matt. 25, 1-13.

The kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are expressions which occur very often in the New Testament. Reading these expressions, one is apt to think of the kingdom which God has in heaven, the everlasting kingdom of glory, and sometimes it is used in reference to the kingdom of glory in the world to come, as when it is said ; “ Drunkards shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” 1 Cor. 6, 10. But commonly this expression means the kingdom which God has on earth, the kingdom of Christ, or the Christian Church, and this is especially the case in the parables of Jesus. When we read : “ *Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins,*” this is as much as saying : The kingdom of Christ on earth may be compared with ten virgins.

But the kingdom of Christ on earth, the Church, is spoken of in two different relations. Sometimes it signifies the community of saints, to which no wicked person and no hypocrite can belong, which is composed purely of those who are the children of God in deed and in truth. This is the meaning when

the Lord says to Nicodemus: "Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." John 3, 5. Here it means that Church, that communion, to which no unregenerate person can belong, the kingdom of which those only are citizens who are born again of water and of the Spirit. But in His parables the Lord generally uses this expression to designate His kingdom on earth, as we behold it with our bodily eyes, the visible Church, comprising together all those who are called Christians and who profess to be followers of Christ. In this kingdom are comprised those who are Christians in deed and in truth, together with sham Christians, who have the name and fame of being Christians and are not, yea even such also who have their name on the church-roll, but live in manifest sin. In the parable before us the Lord uses this expression as denoting the visible Church; for of these virgins some were wise and were ready to meet the Lord, some were foolish and not ready to meet Him. Accordingly let me ask:

WHEN ARE WE READY TO MEET THE BRIDEGROOM?

This text answers:

- I. When we have our lamps trimmed and supplied with oil;
- II. When we are found watching.

I.

This parable is taken from the marriage ceremonies of the ancient Hebrews, the details of which are not all known in our time any more. We know that there were virgins of honor at Jewish weddings, and it is probable that these virgins of honor went forth to await the groom at a certain place and to conduct him with burning lamps to the house of the bride. To a custom of this kind the Lord refers when He says: "*Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.*"

The Bridegroom is Jesus Christ, who will appear visibly in the clouds of heaven, when the time for the marriage of the

Lamb has come. The ten virgins represent the Church which is waiting for the coming of the Lord. Paul likewise compares the Church unto a virgin, when he writes: "I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." 2 Cor. 11, 2. The Church is to be untarnished with false doctrines, undefiled by sin, unspotted from the world. The Church is to be a virgin bride, pure and faithful, devoted to her Groom alone. So should the Church be in all her members, espoused to One Husband, intent on pleasing Him, a virgin beautiful and lovely and irreproachable, having her lamp polished and without a speck, and the flame rising straight to the heavens like the flame on the altar of burnt offerings. But alas! so the Church of these latter days is not. Unto her rather applies the word of the prophet, exclaiming over Jerusalem: "How is the faithful city become an harlot! Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water." Is. 1, 21. Yes, the Church of modern days is become an harlot, dallying with strangers in the temples of Secretism and in the Parliaments of Religions. She is become a flirt, smiling on the rivals of Christ and courting the favor of the world. O that the Church would awake, to see the error of her ways and to return again to her "first love!" O that she would gird her loins to "do the first works," ere the Lord do unto her what He threatened to the church at Ephesus, saying: "Or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." Rev. 2, 5.

The lamp signifies the profession of religion. These ten virgins do not represent the heathen and infidels, nor those who candidly say that they belong to the "big church," the worldlings who make no profession of being Christians; but they represent the visible Church. Taking the lamp and going forth to meet the Bridegroom means joining the Church and making the profession of being a Christian. You must leave the market place and go to the vineyard, you must separate from the "big church" and must join the Church of Jesus Christ before you are numbered with those who go forth to meet the

Bridegroom. If you have lived unconcerned about church and religion, remember, that they who never even join themselves to the company of those who go to meet the Groom will certainly not be found in the marriage hall. You see church spires pointing up to the heavens; every Sunday morning you hear the metal heralds ring forth the invitation: Come to the house of worship; and if you do not even count it worth while to go to preaching, you will verily be without excuse, "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." 2 Thes. 1, 7. Improve your time of grace and squander it not, or you will be out forever.

But this parable is specially for church members. In their outward appearance these virgins were much alike. Some of them may have had their lamp in better trim than others, but as they marched along the street they were all members of a bridal party to lookers on. So soon as a man has joined the Church he is counted by the world as one who has gone forth to meet the Bridegroom, or at least one making that profession.

But even the world knows that not all church members are Christians in deed and in truth. Of these virgins "*five were wise, and five were foolish.*" The main point is not what we profess, but what we are. I know what you profess to be, but what are you? You profess to be a Christian; are you one? The wise are the true Christians, the foolish are those who profess to be Christians and are not. We mortals judge by the outward profession. We cannot see into the heart, and we therefore hold those to be Christians who confess Christ and who do not contradict their profession by their works. But the Lord looks to the heart. He does not judge by the profession. He asks: What are you? Are you wise, or are you foolish? Foolish indeed is every one who professes to be a Christian and is not. He may deceive the children of this world, although these have a sharp eye to discover hypocrisy, but he cannot blindfold Him who formed the eye. When the Lord comes the mask will drop from his face and his duplicity will be set in light.

Are you a true Christian, or are you a hypocrite? Look and see and delude not yourself; for it is verily true what one of old has said: "The greatest fools are those who are wise in their own conceit, and the worst sinners are those who feign piety."

In what the wisdom and the folly of these virgins was manifested the Lord tells us in these words: "*They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.*" Folly to take the lamps and nothing to keep them burning. It is an insult to the Bridegroom to meet Him with lamps gone out and giving no light, and the smoking wick diffusing an unpleasant odor. Works of piety not proceeding from faith may make a show before men, but in the valley of death the flame expires, leaving nothing but a stench odious to the Bridegroom. Yes, there are five and more such church members whose preparation to meet the Lord consists only in the profession of religion and a few works of worship, and in the day of judgment these are burned up like stubble.

Wisdom is to take a supply of oil to keep the lamp burning for all time. This oil is true, living and justifying faith in Jesus Christ; for in the temple He cried out, saying: "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness." John 12, 46. When true faith is in the heart the mouth will make a true profession and the hand will do right works, and as long as faith is in the heart it will shine forth in a walk of godliness. The reason why faith will keep the lamp burning even in that awful day when heaven and earth will pass away is, because it does not trust in the works of man, but in the merits of Christ. Grasping Christ's fulfillment of the law and His atonement for sin faith holds that which is an everlasting righteousness, and is valid, not in time only, but also in eternity. It is therefore in full harmony with the rule of faith and the tenor of this parable to say, that the oil is the merit of Christ and faith is the vessel in which the five wise virgins carried the oil. Concerning the knowledge of Jesus Christ St. Paul writes: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God,

and not of us." 2 Cor. 4, 7. As the hand holding a treasure of gold makes rich, so faith holding the merits of Christ holds an everlasting righteousness, a righteousness which is valid in eternity and which will and must be pleasing to the Bridegroom; for the soul wrapped in this righteousness is dressed in the Groom's own garments and cannot otherwise than be pleasing to Him.

The wise virgin, the true Christian, is an humble soul, knowing and acknowledging that he has sinned and deserves nothing but punishment, but his trust is in Jesus Christ, of whom he is persuaded that He will save him from his sins and will preserve him from everlasting torment. Constrained by the love of Jesus he does good at every opportunity; his light cannot remain hid; his lamp is burning and shining; but he never aims to make a show, he loves best to do good in secret, unnoticed of men. The foolish virgin, the sham Christian, is also zealous unto good works, perhaps so much so that men regard him an exemplary Christian, but inwardly he is lacking the oil of repentance and faith. He may praise Christ highly and speak of Him daily, yet his heart's trust for righteousness is not actually in the merits of Jesus Christ, but rather in his own working for Christ.

They both bear shining lamps in the sight of men, and indeed the lamp of the second may appear much the brighter, but when the Lord comes the lamp of the first will continue to burn, nourished by the oil of faith in Christ's merits, but the lamp of the second will suddenly go out and he will be left in darkness. His works were a shining light in the sight of men, but before the Lord they are nothing but a dark lantern, because the light of faith is not in them, and "whatever is not of faith is sin." Rom. 14, 23. Setting out to meet the Bridegroom let your lamp be polished and burning; follow holiness and be fruitful in good works; but first of all provide yourself with the oil of faith in the merits of Christ. Dress your soul in the robe of His righteousness, in it to appear before God. Then you will be found truly wise according to the Lord's own counsel; for so He commanded John to write to the Church at Laodicea:

"I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed." Rev. 3, 18.

II.

When we have provided ourselves with oil by faith in Christ's merits, then it behooves us to walk with care lest we spill it. We must not do like these virgins, of whom the Lord says: "*While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.*" The Lord will come at a time when Christendom has become sleepy and has fallen to slumbering, when even the true Christians are like the disciples in Gethsemane. To this Paul bears witness, writing: "Ye know that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." 1 Thes. 5, 2. A thief comes when people are sleeping and not expecting him. When men shall say: "Peace and safety," then suddenly the cry will be raised: "*Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.*"

"*Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.*" When the trump of the archangel will announce the coming of the Bridegroom, then all who professed to be followers of Jesus Christ will bestir themselves, and will come from the four winds of the earth. But alas! the foolish virgins find their lamps gone out. The material with which they were wont to fill them, their zeal, their piety, their good works, is all burned up, and they are left without a ray of light. So they cannot meet the Bridegroom. They must have oil to cause their lamps to burn, that oil which the wise have, whose lamps they see burning so brightly. In their lifetime they had despised these for clinging so closely to Jesus Christ and making so much of Him and so little of themselves and their own works, but now they see that these were truly wise in providing themselves with the oil of Jesus' blood and righteousness, and, tormented by the fear that they must sink into everlasting darkness, they go to the wise and say: "*Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.*" Now they would surrender their own honor and set aside their works of piety, if they could only be partakers with the wise.

But this oil is of such a nature that each must buy it for himself and none can communicate of his own to others. "The just shall live by *his* faith." Heb. 2, 4. Each one must hold the merits of Christ for himself and no one can hold them in trust for another. Therefore the wise reply: "*Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.*" Recognizing the truth and propriety of this advice the foolish virgins hasten away. They remember the market where the merits of Christ used to be cried out for sale, but when they look for the place the market house has disappeared. No preacher preaches there any more. The place where the oil of Christ's righteousness was cried out for sale to every one who would buy without money and without price, is become silent as the grave. The market is over; there is no more selling and buying; the preaching of the Gospel has stopped forever. They are too late; not one drop of oil is to be had any more.

In their despair they return and approach the bridal hall, but the door is locked. They knock, but no one opens and there is no voice bidding them enter. They knock again, they moan, they plead, they cry: "*Lord, Lord, open to us.*" At last a voice comes from within, a voice the accents of which chills their souls with horror, and the voice says: "*Verily I say unto you, I know you not.*" What! He knows them not! Were they not popes and prelates? were they not famous preachers? were they not pious men and women praised for their many works of charity? were they not people who could make long prayers and tell about their experiences and what they all did? And He knows them not? Do they not protest? Nay, they protest not. The consciousness that they would not have the salvation which was offered them freely, renders them speechless. They were not humble enough to acknowledge that nothing in heaven or on earth could heal them save only the oil which flowed from the five wounds of Christ crucified. They make no protest. They know that the Lord is right in leaving them without in outer darkness where is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

“ Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.” The Lord has hid the time of His coming that we should hold ourselves in readiness always. If we knew the date of His coming, we would not need to study this parable before the appointed time, but whether He will come in this century or the next, whether in spring or in fall, whether in the morning or at noon, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven. Prophecies fixing the day and date of His coming are nothing but dreams of infatuated men, and they that believe them are credulous dupes who justly fall into strong delusion to believe a lie, because they depart from the written Word of God which says: *“ Ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.”*

But one thing we do know from the written Word of God, that the signs of His coming are fulfilled. The time is nigh. Therefore let us not slumber, but make sure that we belong to the wise and not to the foolish virgins. The Lord is surely coming, and whether we will live to witness it, or will be in our graves, makes no material difference, because as man dies so he remains. Those that died centuries ago will rise again as they died, having their lamps either burning or gone out. Then will brother come to brother begging oil and will be refused. Then will a mother haste with gladness to the bridal hall, leaving her daughter to wail in woe. Then will members of the same congregation part, some going into darkness, some uniting with the company of the apostles and martyrs. Then we will be judged, not according to what we seem, but according to what we are.

And let no one say, a little slumber could do no harm, because those five wise virgins also fell to slumbering and yet entered the bridal hall. It makes a vast difference whether you are overtaken by drowsiness against your will and consent, or whether you intentionally fall to dozing. In the latter case you do certainly not belong to the wise virgins, but will share the fate of the foolish, unless you arouse. Neither did the five wise virgins sleep so profoundly as to forget the Bridegroom, oil, lamps and all. When the call came they had their

supply of oil at hand to replenish their lamps. Being overcome by drowsiness does not at once make a man an unchristian; for so long as he holds Christ, though with a sleepy hand, he has the whole treasure, but there is a great danger connected with it. If a man holding a piece of gold in his hand becomes sleepy he has it still; he falls to slumbering and his hold relaxes more and more. By and by he becomes oblivious, his hand opens and the gold drops from it. "Let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober." 1 Thes. 5, 6.

Watch against the devil's snares,
Lest asleep he find thee ;
For, indeed, no pains he spares
To deceive and blind thee ;
Satan's prey Oft are they,
Who are soundly sleeping,
And not good watch keeping.

My soul, lay thou hold on Him and say: Jesus, Thou art mine forever, Thee and me shall nothing sever. AMEN.

HARVEST HOME SERMON.

PREACHED 1886.

TEXT: And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.—Luke 12, 16-21.

We have gathered together to-day, publicly to return thanks to God for this year's harvest. This is not to be construed as though otherwise we did not think of returning thanks for the harvest, save only on this day. I trust, individually each one did already give sincere thanks to God, when garnering his grain with a grateful heart; for the Christian is accustomed daily to offer thanksgiving to God for all His gifts. If any one amongst us has not thought of giving God thanks for the harvest before to-day, it is much to be feared that his heart is not right before God; for our heart is to be grateful to God, giving thanks not only sometimes, but always; and not only in some things, but in all things. Yet, though individually we have already returned thanks to God, it is nevertheless now, after all the crops have been secured, becoming, that we publicly and in unison acknowledge the goodness of the Lord and appear in His house with thanksgiving. For this we have great reason in the present year, because the seasons have been highly favorable and the crops abundant. Profusely has God granted His blessing in field and garden, and scarcely anything can be named which, in this year, could be called a total failure.

The objection might be raised, the abundant crops could be of little advantage to the farmer, because farm products bring so exceedingly low prices. It is not to be denied that there is reason for this complaint, and to some the low prices may cause serious embarrassments; nevertheless it is certain that this complaint, as a general thing, is not owing to a lack of daily bread which God has given in abundance, it springs rather from the fact that the low prices curtail the value of the surplus which is over and above daily bread. If you can not lift up your heart to give thanks with gladness, because the year does not increase your surplus savings as much as you think it ought, then there is something wrong in your heart, and I advise you earnestly to consider the words of the Lord in our text. Let us not be like unto the Israelites in the wilderness who, when daily receiving the necessary quantity of the best of food, nevertheless murmured, because they lusted after the delicacies of Egypt. When God grants us daily bread and grants it in such abundance as He has done this year, our hearts should overflow with gratitude and our lips should say: O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good; He has filled our garners and has given us bread for a year.

But let us not forget that singing praises with the tongue and offering thanks with the lips is not sufficient; the right and true gratitude must rather manifest itself in this way that the proceeds of the harvest are put to a right use and the abuse thereof is avoided. And as the harvest is so abundant let me to-day direct your attention specially to the abuse which must be avoided, if we are not to be found ungrateful before God. Now in general, the proceeds of an abundant harvest may be and are abused in two ways. The one way of abusing them is to squander them. We are not to be like unto the prodigal son who lived a fast and riotous life, and did not stop until he had wasted all his substance. Wastefulness and high living are not Christian virtues; they are an abuse of God's gifts. When Jesus had satiated those 5000 men with five loaves, He bade the disciples: "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost." John 6, 12. He wanted the surplus hus-

banded and not wasted. God does not give His gifts to be wasted, He delights in frugality and wise economy, wherefore Solomon says: "Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labor shall increase." Prov. 13, 11. The other way of abusing the proceeds of the harvest is to hoard them up and to set the heart's affections upon them. Of this our text treats. Let us therefore briefly consider:

THE FOLLY OF SETTING THE AFFECTIONS ON EARTHLY RICHES.

This is folly.

- I. Because it prevents making provision for the soul; and
- II. Because to those that would be rich death comes unexpected.

I.

In the parable contained in this text the Lord pictures to us a wealthy farmer who was gathering, or who had gathered, an abundant harvest. The Lord describes this man to us in his sentiments, plans, calculations, undertakings, and in his death; for so He says: "*The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.*" From the whole drift of the parable it is clear that this man was not a stingy old miser. If he had been a miser he would have dreaded the cost of pulling down his barns and building new ones. To a miser the building of an addition would have commended itself as cheaper and more economic, and a miser will never think of now living a merry life. No, this man was not a stingy old miser. Neither was he a wretch who had become rich by dishonesty, usury and oppression of the poor. Not with a single syllable does the Lord indicate that this man had gotten his wealth by unfair dealings and fraudulent means; the words: "*The ground of a certain rich*

man" rather convey the idea that this ground was rightly and justly his own by inheritance or honest acquisition. The Lord did certainly not mean to represent a specimen of a man rarely found, He intended to present the sample of a man very frequently met with.

Take into consideration the whole text and you can not fail to see that this man was a well to do, an honorable and a very respectable country gentleman. There is no repulsive miserliness and no manifest viciousness about him. There is nothing in his sentiments or doings which the world would condemn as wickedness or meanness, or which it would ridicule as folly. He owned a fine plantation and he was an industrious and careful farmer who attended to the cultivation of his soil. Now a year of abundance happened to come. His barns were not spacious enough to hold his profuse harvest. So he went to calculating what to do, and he concluded to build large barns with roomy granaries in which to store this fine harvest, and he said to himself, this accomplished, he would be satisfied and would take his ease.

What was wrong with this man? Was it wrong that he owned a fine plantation? Certainly not. Was it wrong that he had a prolific harvest? O, that was God's gift. Was it wrong that he wanted to secure his grain? No indeed! that was duty. Was it wrong that he planned large and spacious barns? Surely not. You earthly-minded man, can you tell me, what was wrong with this man? Be honest, come out with your heart's sentiment, and I expect to hear you say: Why there was nothing in the world wrong with this man; he was a wise man, a prudent man, a man with good sound common sense about him. This is the maxim, this is the principle, this the sentiment of the earthly-minded and the world at large: Get rich, make provision for many years, and then enjoy easy days, eat, drink and be merry. Men of this mind you can find plenty everywhere, and not only among churchless people, they are not rare among church-goers. The earthly-minded think only of earthly gain and earthly pleasures; to win and to possess these is wisdom with them.

But in the Lord's judgment all was wrong with this man, because his whole heart's sentiment was wrong. His sentiment is revealed by his words: "*What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.*" Not one word has this man to say about the Giver. His whole heart, mind and soul are wrapped up in this fine harvest and his other goods. The text contains no indication that this man was a public despiser of God and His Word. It is rather to be assumed that he, according to the law of Moses, brought the first-fruits of his harvest to the sanctuary for a thankoffering to the Lord, but this was with him only an outward, mechanical act; his heart was not in it. The affections of his heart being centred on the gifts, he forgot the Giver; and not according to his outward works, but according to his heart's sentiment does the Lord here describe him.

This sentiment is revealed still more clearly by his following words: "*And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.*" He has not a word to say about death, heaven and eternity. When he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath his heart remained with his possessions and his mind was filled with his plans and undertakings. Is this any wonder? Why just look how many things this man had to do! He had to care for his domains; he had to govern his household; he had to secure his harvest; he had to make plans and contracts for his buildings, to say nothing of the many hours it daily and nightly took him to calculate the value of his possessions and the amount of his profits, and to picture to his imagination the easy days which he expected to enjoy. This man had no time to think of such far away things as heaven and eternity. His mind was intent on his earthly possessions and plans and no time was left him to make provision for his soul.

The earthly-minded have not the time to lay up for themselves treasures in heaven, because their earthly business, plans and hopes demand all their time and attention. Therefore the

man in our text made a very dubious calculation when he proposed to say to his soul: "*Take thine ease.*" He did not live long enough for this his resolution to be tested, but would he have carried it out, if he had lived? Hardly. When seeding time would have come around, it would most likely have found this man making preparation not to miss the next harvest. Gathering money to become rich is like drinking salt-water. The more a man drinks the thirstier he becomes. The more money the lover of money makes, the more he wants to make.

Should I proceed to make special applications of all this? I will rather forbear. The parable in itself is plain and simple enough. Allow me only this one remark: Let no one say that this text concerns only the rich who have harvested much. The Lord does not say: So are the rich who possess extensive plantations and need two or three barns; the Lord says: "*So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.*" The heart of a day-laborer may be filled with the craving after money and easy days just as well as that of the wealthy planter. It is not a sin to be poor and it is not a sin to be rich; God makes both the poor and the rich, even as Hannah, the mother of Samuel, sang: "The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up." 1 Sam. 2, 7. It is not a sin to have harvested little, and it is not a sin to have harvested much; God gives the harvest. But this is the ungodliness, this is the folly, this is the madness of heart, if mind and soul is so wrapped up in earthly things as to forget death and eternity, heaven and hell. That such is indeed madness of heart is illustrated clearly by the example of the man in our text. What was his end?

II.

When this man was in the midst of his calculations and plans, "*God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?*" Behold a man greatly to be pitied! Perhaps for many years this man had labored and saved. Night and day had he perplexed his mind with projects how to in-

crease his goods, and now when he had reached his object, when he said he had enough and might commence to enjoy it, now he must die. Poor man! He had no good of his life in this world; for he consumed his years in scraping riches together, and when he had them, the time for him to render up his soul had come. To the earthly-minded death comes unexpected, because they have not the time to think of death or to prepare for it. How can that man be prepared for death whose mind is bent on making money? Let death come to him ever so late, it nevertheless comes too early. Before he is ready he must go, and he does not even know who will get what he has hoarded up with so much labor and trouble.

True, a common excuse for pursuing after riches is the saying: I must leave something to my children. But will your children get it? And if they do get it, will they keep it? And if they keep it, will it be a blessing unto them? If you have raised your children in the fear of the Lord and have instructed them from the Word of God, how to regard and how to use earthly possessions in a Christian manner, then the probability is, that they will keep what you leave to them, and it will be increased unto them; for God has promised to bless the pious children of pious parents; but if your heart is set on gathering money and you rear your children in the same sentiment, then your bequest will only be a curse to them; for God has threatened to punish the sins of the parents in the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him; wherefore David says of the wicked: "He heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them." Ps. 39, 6. O surely, the love of money is a root of all evil; it destroys the own soul and brings a curse upon children and children's children.

And now, my friends, let me assure you that this sermon is not preached to mar your joy over the abundance of this present year; over God's gifts our hearts should always rejoice; but it is to warn us of a danger. The germ of earthly-mindedness was in us already when we were infants in the cradle, and its nature is to assert itself and to grow from year to year. By virtue of the inclination which is in us it is natural for us

earth-born mortals to become more earthly-minded the older we get. A fine farm, a handful of banknotes, overflowing granaries, these things have a wonderful attraction to the heart and soul. Strong is the temptation for the heart to find its satisfaction in these things. A man need not be a close-fisted miser, he need not be a manifest slave to avarice, if his earthly possessions occupy the first place in his heart, he is earthly-minded like the man in our text. We must, therefore, be on our guard that our harvest do not become a snare unto us to draw our hearts to the earth. We should rather so rejoice over the harvest that our joy is not actually over the gift itself, but rather over the munificent goodness of the Father in heaven; then it is right, then our thanksgiving is a sweet melody in the ears of the Lord of hosts.

Finally, the abundance of the harvest ought to remind us that this should be our first and foremost care, to be found "*rich toward God.*" Now we are rich before God if, in the vessel of faith, we hold the righteousness, the grace, the love and all the riches of Christ. If we bring these things before God as our treasures, then we are accounted rich *before* Him; for these things are valuable in His sight. But what the expression "*rich toward God*" in the Scripture language properly means, St. Paul tells us when He writes to Timothy: "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." I Ep. 6. 17.

Show yourself rich toward God by showing yourself liberal toward His Church. If you are in earnest when you say that the harvest is God's gift, then consecrate a portion to Him. A Christian farmer should regard it self-evident that a portion goes to the support of the Church, and he should not regard it an alms either. Be not so miserly toward the Church that she must institute a fair or a raffle to get a few cents out of your

pocket, and do not regard your Church a mendicant to whom you give a pittance from pity. Let the Church have her goodly portion and give it with a lithe and lusty heart. It will not be your loss. The Lord of the Church is also the Lord of the harvest, and He can return it the next year.

And do not forget the poor. Among the Israelites there was to be no beggar, and certainly the Christian Church should not suffer any of her poor to knock at the doors of unbelievers, begging bread. The Church should account those of her members who are stricken with earthly poverty a peculiar treasure, because in them she can feed and clothe the Lord Jesus Himself; for what is done to the members is done to the Head.

Let your hearts be glad, because God has again crowned your industry with His temporal blessings; but let this remain your first and highest husbandry that you hold the riches of Christ with the hand of faith, and that you strive after those things which the apostle commends; then you are rich both *before* God and *toward* God, and His good pleasure will rest upon you. To Him, from whom all good gifts do proceed, even to the Father of light, be honor and glory through Jesus Christ.
AMEN.

MICHAELMAS.

TEXT: "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." Matt. 18, 10.

In the table of Gospels for the church year you will find the extract from which this text has been read noted as the Gospel for St. Michael's day. This St. Michael is not a Catholic saint, but the archangel Michael, and the day was and is still observed as the festival of the holy angels. Finding a text given for this day and in our hymnbook also hymns for Michaelmas this might be regarded by some as smacking of popery, but that is an altogether unwarranted thought. To have a day in the year on which the doctrine of the holy angels is expounded has certainly not one thing to do with popery. The day was indeed kept under popery and there it was greatly abused; for the priests preached many ridiculous fables of angels' apparitions, and the people were taught to worship the angels. If then the day was abused, why was its observance not altogether abolished by Luther? Before sanctioning sweeping principles we should always examine them as to their soundness. Would it be a right principle to say that a thing must be abolished, because it is abused? Certainly not. What is more abused than money? Yet no man will say that it must therefore be abolished. Or must prayer be abolished, because it is often abused to make an empty show of piety?

If Luther had aimed to put away all that had been abused under popery, he must have abolished every thing, because there was scarcely any thing left which was not abused unto superstition. Luther's principle was to retain those things which could be put to a good and profitable use, to divest them of superstitious abuse and to restore their right use, and only by firmly adhering to this principle did Luther preserve the reformation from degenerating into a revolution.

Whilst, therefore, Luther abolished the observance of a score of saints' days he retained the days set apart in memory of the apostles, and some other days which could be used to advantage for the preaching of the Gospel. Why he wanted St. Michael's retained he tells us in a sermon on this text, in which he says: "In this Gospel we hear Christ mention the holy angels; on which account we also determined to retain the observance of St. Michael's festival, not for St. Michael's sake alone, but in honor of the whole multitude of all the angels. This we did, because the instruction and knowledge concerning the angels shall and must remain among the Christians; for it is very useful and comforting to know what they are, what office they have and what we are to believe of them." These words of Luther do certainly not smack of popery, and just as little do they sanction radicalism. Luther was a man who was not carried away by passion or opinion. He calmly and dispassionately examined every thing according to its own intrinsic merit and dealt with it accordingly. He saw that St. Michael's could be made to answer a good purpose; so he retained it, and it is still observed at many places. We here in our church do not keep this day, but we do not say that those sin who do keep it, neither do they say that we sin in not keeping it. In such things conservative Christians allow each other liberty without condemning one another agreeably to the words of Paul when he writes to the Romans 14, 5: "One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it."

Whether we keep St. Michael's day or not, we should certainly know what God has revealed to us concerning

THE HOLY ANGELS.

Let me endeavor to set forth

I. What the Scriptures teach concerning the Angels; and

II. How this Doctrine is profitable for Comfort and Admonition.

I.

Besides this visible universe God has created a host of incorporeal and invisible spirits or angels. No one who believes the Bible will undertake to question this fact. In our text the Lord speaks of angels, saying: "*In heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father.*" If there were no angels the Lord who is Himself the truth could mention none. That the angels were created through Jesus Christ St. Paul distinctly affirms when he writes: "By him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him." Col. 1, 16. That they were created in the six days work we learn from the words of Moses, saying: "In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is." Ex. 20, 11. That comprises the angels of heaven, although we are not told on which of the six days they were created. The dwelling place of the angels is in heaven, as the Lord here says: "*In heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father.*" The angels are those beings who surround the throne of their Maker, and who dwell in His presence, the highest, the brightest and most glorious of all His creatures.

In their essence the angels are spirits. The epistle to the Hebrews says of them: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" Ch. 1, 14. Being spirits the angels have no material bodies, as the Lord said to the disciples when He was risen from the dead: "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." Luke 24, 39. Having no material bodies the angels can neither be seen nor handled. In pictures they are represented with bodies in the form of winged children or virgins, but we must not think that the angels really are as they are pictured. In fact an angel can not be pictured, as little as God or the soul can. They are pictured as children with wings to denote their innocence, beauty and swiftness. The angels can however temporarily assume a bodily form, can make them-

selves visible and appear to men. For this there are a great many examples in the Scriptures. When the disciples on Mount Olive were gazing after Jesus as He ascended up to heaven, suddenly "two men stood by them in white apparel." Those two angels appeared in the form of men dressed in white, and they also spake the language of men; for they said: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." Acts 1, 11.

From our text we learn some important truths concerning the angels. "*Their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.*" The angels behold the face of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the highest and most supreme bliss which creatures can enjoy. St. John speaks of this when he writes: "We shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is." 1 Ep. 3, 2. The angels are perfectly happy creatures. Nothing is lacking them which they might crave, and pain and sorrow is unknown to them. Always beholding the face of the Father in heaven they are ever enjoying the highest bliss. This also implies that the angels are perfectly holy beings, else they could not stand in the presence of God; for in the fifth Psalm it is said: "The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity." Some angels fell away from God and were banished from His countenance for ever, but those who remained steadfast are not and never were soiled by the least sin. Of these holy beings there is a countless host. Here the Lord says that children have their angels, and as there are millions of children there must be myriads of angels. In Gethsemane the Lord said unto Peter: "Thinkest thou that I can not now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels," more than seventy-two thousand. Matt. 26, 53. Of this countless multitude of angels each one is a host in himself. Here the Lord indicates that they are sent to be guardians of children; so they are mighty to protect; for God does not send them to do what they are not able to perform. When Sennacherib threatened to destroy Jerusalem the Lord sent an angel to protect the city, and in one

night he slew of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand men. The angels of the Lord are mighty protectors.

Concerning the occupation of the angels two things are indicated in the Lord's words: "*Their angels do always behold the face of my Father.*" They behold the Father's face not only to see their own happiness in it, but also to know and to do His will. They are like servants always ready to do what they are told, wherefore David charges them, saying: "Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word." Ps. 103, 20. A special occupation of the angels is to protect children. Often are little children most wonderfully preserved in the most imminent dangers, because the angels guard them. This angelic protection is not for the children only, it extends over all the pious, as David testifies in the 34th Psalm: "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them." The angels do not live in idleness, they are ministering spirits who go like a flash wherever they are sent, and do with alacrity whatever they are commanded. So in the words of our text, short as they are, we have a pretty complete outline as to what the angels are and what they do.

II.

And now we must not think that this doctrine of the holy angels could be of no benefit unto us. God has embodied no useless teachings in the volume of His revelation. "All scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." 2 Tim. 3, 16. The doctrine of the angels is peculiarly useful for reproof and comfort. But here it is well to be remembered that this doctrine, as well as all other teachings of the Scriptures, may be misapplied. The angels are not gods, neither are they mediators between God and us. We must not worship the angels, neither must we in any way call upon them to make intercession for us. When John fell down to worship the angel who had showed him great things, the angel refused to be worshipped by him, saying:

“See thou do it not: I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God.” Rev. 19, 10. The angels do not want to be worshipped by us. Neither should we expect revelations from the angels. There have often been such who claimed that angels appeared to them and gave them instructions and commands. These were either themselves deceivers, or they were deceived by the artfulness of Satan, or the hallucination of their own senses. In olden time God did frequently send His angels to bear messages to men, but since the book of His revelation is completed He does no more send His angels for this purpose. In this Book God has laid down all those things which He wanted us to know, and even though an angel would come to teach us we should not hear him, unless his teachings would be in perfect harmony with the Scriptures; for thus St. Paul writes: “Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.” Gal. 1, 8. We are to search the Scriptures and from them to learn the will of our God, and we are not to expect angelic apparitions.

On the other hand, that which is revealed unto us concerning the angels must awaken our admiration, and constrain us to fall down and to adore the greatness of our God. This visible universe is vast even beyond our imagination. Broad is the face of the earth, and diversified by land and water, mountain and plain it affords nourishment for a thousand million of people. The heavenly bodies above us are scattered through space at unmeasured distances and since almost six thousand years they have revolved in their courses more exact in their motions than any clockwork ever made by man. Yet all nations are before the Lord like a drop hanging to a bucket, and this whole universe is only a temporary building soon to be taken down again. But what our eyes behold is not all of God’s creation. Over and above this visible universe He has built a tabernacle greater and infinitely more glorious, populated with bright and shining beings who continually raise their voices in praise of their own and our Maker, who are ever

tuning their harps to make a joyful noise unto the Lord; and that tabernacle will not be taken down again, it is to stand for ever. Into this everlasting tabernacle all those shall be received who fear His Word, who love the Lord Jesus Christ and who walk in His ways. Great is our God and greatly to be praised. "Marvellous," exclaims David, "are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well." Ps. 139, 14.

This great God looks down upon us sinful mortals with loving compassion, and a conclusive proof of His kindness towards us is the fact that He sends those glorious beings, the holy angels from His tabernacle on high to encamp round about us and our children. This text evidently implies that children have their guardian angels. Certainly a very comforting truth. Where is the mother who could sufficiently guard her little ones? But God cares for them, placing His angels guard over them to protect them in danger and to preserve them from mishaps. This fact is not to create or promote neglectfulness in parents; for nowhere in the Bible do we read that the angels protect the wicked and their children. But to Christian parents it is a goodly comfort to know their little ones under the guardianship of the heavenly hosts. And not only they, we also are daily surrounded by manifold evils and dangers, dangers of which we ourselves are often not conscious and against which we could nevermore protect ourselves. But we have the promise of the 91st Psalm: "Because thou hast made the Lord which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." If we have our conversation in the fear of God, avoiding evil and following sanctification, the angels are round about us, and surely these messengers of the Lord are a better protection than a body-guard of armed men, as numerous examples in the Scriptures demonstrate. An angel went with those three men whom Nebuchadnezzar, the mightiest king on earth, cast into a fiery oven, and when those men emerged from that furnace not even the smell

of fire was upon them. They were in the fire, but the fire could not kindle upon them, because the angel prevented it.

When can we comfort ourselves that the holy angels are our companions? Not when walking in wicked ways. "Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." 1 Cor. 6, 9. Now the angels of heaven are not the companions of those who are not heirs of salvation. When Balaam had accepted the wages of unrighteousness to curse Israel the angel of the Lord did go with him, yet not to protect him, but to stand against him with a drawn sword. If we walk in the ways which the Lord has not commanded us to go we have not the promise that the angels shall bear us up in their hands. They are grieved to see men walk in sin, and they stand against those who rebel against the Lord.

Here the Lord tells us that the angels are the companions of children and in a preceding verse He says: "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." If we turn unto the Lord and become as little children, if we receive His Word in simple faith as children do the word of their mother, if we follow Him in all simplicity and humility wherever He leads as little children follow their father, then His angels are our companions and they form a fiery wall around us. Likewise, the Scriptures declare that there is joy with the angels of heaven over one sinner that repents. If you have sinned repent of it and imitate the Roman centurion Cornelius. When an angel directed him to send for the apostle Peter, and Peter came and told him the Word of Jesus, Cornelius received it with faith and joy and obtained the gift of the Holy Ghost, and when he was become a temple of the Holy Ghost then certainly the angels of the Lord were encamped round about him. Hear the Word of Christ, receive it with meekness and cling to Him as penitent sinners who have no other refuge save His Cross, and the angels will be your friends. And if you will let Him gird you and guide you, and will continue to increase in godliness,

His angels will abide with you, and when you come to die they will be ready to carry your soul into Abraham's bosom. Daily let us offer up this petition to our God: Take not Thy ministering spirits from us.

Still let them succor us; still let them fight,
Lord of angelic hosts! battling for right:
Till, where their anthems they ceaselessly pour,
We with the angels may bow and adore. Amen.

REFORMATION.

TEXT: And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.—Matt. 11, 12–15.

Whenever God conferred great benefits on His Church on earth, both the deeds of God and the men whom He chose for His instruments have been held in grateful and honorable remembrance in the Church. Moses and Aaron, together with the deliverance out of Egypt, were never forgotten in Israel. When the Israelites had been saved from the hand of Haman by queen Esther, the Purim festival was introduced in commemoration of this wonderful deed of God, and it is still observed as a day of rejoicing among the Jews. In remembrance of such a great deed of God, by which He bestowed untold blessing upon His Church, this thirty-first day of October is observed in our Evangelical Lutheran Church. It commemorates the Reformation of the sixteenth century, in which God through the instrumentality of Martin Luther exposed the great anti-christ and broke the yoke which he had laid on the necks of the Christians. We Lutherans annually greet this day with gladness, because our heart is enlarged as often as we remember that glorious deed, the liberation of the Church from the tyranny of Rome.

We do of course not celebrate this day in honor of Luther as a man, as ill-informed men have sometimes accused our Church. This too belongs to the precious fruits of the Reformation that we do no more celebrate festivals in honor of the saints. The deluded followers of the pope annually devote many days to the worship of saints, depriving Christ of the honor which belongs to Him alone. The thirty-first of October is celebrated in thankful remembrance of the restoration of the Gospel. We very readily grant that we do not despise

Luther, neither are we ashamed of him, we highly honor him, and we know that we do right. Thus St. Paul exhorts Timothy; "Be not thou ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel." 2 Ep. 1, 8. Luther was a faithful witness of the truth, and if we are lovers of the truth we cannot be ashamed of him. "Remember them," says the Epistle to the Hebrews, "who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation." Ch. 13, 7.

When God awakens great and gifted men and blesses their labors that they accomplish works which bring permanent blessing to the Church, their memory is to be blessed among those who enjoy the benefit of their labors. We honor the apostles not on account of their persons,—of their persons we know very little—, but because the Lord selected them and made them His agents for the planting of the Church. Even so we honor Luther, because God honored him in using him to restore the Church again in its primitive form, but we know full well that Luther was nothing more than only God's instrument, as he himself also knew and confessed.

Since the planting of the Church by the apostles, there has been no greater and more blessed work on earth than the Reformation of the sixteenth century, a fact which no man who is acquainted with the history of the Christian Church will venture to deny. To perpetuate the remembrance thereof our Church set apart the words which have been read as Gospel text for to-day. Accordingly let me set forth:

THE SIMILARITY BETWEEN THE REFORMATION OF
JOHN THE BAPTIST AND THAT OF LUTHER.

Let us hear

- I. What John's Reformation was; and
- II. In what Luther's is similar to it.

I.

At the first glance it might seem strange that the words read were selected as text for the Reformation festival. The first

verse reads: "*And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.*" A superficial reader might obtain the idea that these words were chosen as text for Reformation day in remembrance of the violence which many confessors of the truth had to suffer at the hands of the pope and his adherents. Are these people by whom "*the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence*" perhaps the Romish Inquisition with their instruments of torture? It is true, the Romanists claim that they are the only saving Church, and streams of blood have been shed to force Protestants to acknowledge the pope the viceroy of Christ on earth, and Rome would be ready to use forcible means to-day, if it only had the power. But so to understand this text as referring to the enemies who do violence to the kingdom of God by persecuting and killing the true Christians, would be turning it into the very opposite of its true meaning. The Lord is here not speaking of the persecutors who do violence to the true citizens of this kingdom; He is speaking of His true followers who actually set themselves into possession of the kingdom. He says: "*The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.*" These violent ones are those who *take* the kingdom, who really get possession of it and are heirs of God. This cannot be done by physical, bodily violence. Earthly kingdoms may be conquered with the sword, but not the kingdom of heaven. The force here meant is spiritual, not physical. This violence is done with the heart and soul, not with the fist. This is a violence in which God takes great delight, and if we practice it, we prove ourselves true sons and daughters of the Reformation.

The preaching and work of John the Baptist is an illustration of this text. Malachi, the last of the prophets, had spoken of him in these words: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." Ch. 4, 5. This promised Elijah came in the person of John the Baptist, as the Lord testifies in

this text, saying: "*For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias which was for to come.*" Considering the words of Malachi in the light of this text we readily understand them. From the days of Malachi the law and the prophets would remain in Israel until Christ would come, a period of about four hundred years; but an evil time would come when the law and the prophets would be so corrupted by false doctrines and the traditions of men that God would be tempted to smite that generation of corrupters with His direst punishments. In this time of corruption this Elias would come, and he would bring the doctrine of the old prophets to light again and would so turn the fathers to the children, and he would lead the people back into the old way and would so turn the children to the fathers.

When John began to preach, the Jewish Church was in a degenerate condition. The light had been set under a bushel and the saving truth was no more preached, neither in the temple nor in the synagogue. The Pharisees were the teachers and the guides of the people, and they corrupted the law, hid the promise of grace in the Messiah and taught salvation by walking in the outward works of the law and observing the traditions of men. They did teach that Messiah would come, but they represented Him only as a political liberator from the yoke of the Romans, and not a savior from sin, death and hell. They taught nothing of the forgiveness of sin in the promised Seed of woman, and so the people knew nothing of repentance and faith. The whole worship of God consisted in external ceremonies and in keeping the traditions of the elders and the disconsolate hearts were left without comfort. It was a time when those were counted the children of God who externally observed the ceremonies prescribed by Moses and the elders, although inwardly they were full of all uncleanness, and for the broken-hearted sinners those self-righteous teachers had neither balm nor healing.

Now John came and he fearlessly raised his voice against the mighty in Judah. To the scribes and Pharisees he declared: "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee

from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance." Matt. 3, 7. John was a hard preacher against the seducers of the people. Towards the Pharisees his preaching was as rough as the garment which he wore. It was a time when a smooth tongue and soft language could accomplish nothing, when a reformer had to use a sledge-hammer to do his work. And yet how wonderfully kind and mild was John towards the penitent sinners! He preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sin and he directed the contrite and the broken-hearted to the Lamb, which taketh away the sin of the world. So John began to sing a song of free grace as it had not been heard in Israel for many a year.

And what was the result? The preaching of John pierced the hearts of the people that many thousands repented and were baptized in Jordan confessing their sins, and so they pressed into the kingdom as though taking it by storm, but of the Pharisees it is written, that they "rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of John." Luke 7, 30. The Pharisees thought the kingdom of God must be the reward for their labor in the law, but John came preaching: Away with your hypocritical works of righteousness! Together with them you will be cut off and cast into the fire. Moses cannot save you, but the true Savior is already standing among you. Repent of your sins and believe in Him and the kingdom is yours. And many did repent and did turn to Him who came after John, and so they possessed themselves of the kingdom as by violence, while the Pharisees continued to work away in the law to earn the kingdom. So was come to pass what the Lord thereafter declared unto the Pharisees: "Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him." Matt. 21, 31.

There is a commentary on the words of our text: "*And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.*" That young man who said unto the Lord: "All these things

have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?" Matt. 19, 20, did not obtain the kingdom, although he had been working for it from boyhood; Zaccheus, that chief of the publicans, repented of his wickedness, laid hold on the promise of grace and so penetrated into the kingdom in a day. That is a kind of violence which is highly pleasing unto God, if we lay hold on the Word of grace and say: I have His promise; the kingdom is mine, and now, my soul, forwards and take thou possession. That this language is in agreement with the will of the Lord expressed in this text is evident from His words when He says: "The law and the prophets were until John; since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it." Luke 16, 16. This was the Reformation of John that he opened the door again which the Pharisees had shut and proclaimed the free grace of God in the Redeemer.

II.

If perhaps you at first thought this text little suited for the occasion, you will, no doubt, now see that scarcely another passage of Scripture could have been found better adapted for the commemoration of the Reformation. In the main the similarity between the work of John and that of Luther is striking. As the Pharisees had buried the gracious promises of God under the traditions of the elders, so the Gospel of Christ was buried under the traditions of the popes. For a thousand years false teachings, superstitions, vain ceremonies and human traditions of all kinds had been coming into the Church by the ignorance of the people, and by the avarice and ambition of the clergy. So the Gospel was hid under a pile of rubbish. Jesus Christ was indeed not altogether forgotten, in fact His name was on every body's lips, but He was not counted a merciful Savior, He was pictured to the people as a stern judge whose favor must be gained by manifold gifts and the intercession of the saints. The chief fountainhead of the corruption was the false doctrine of justification, that whosoever would be saved must earn heaven by good works and offerings. The people

knew no other way to be saved than by doing what the pope and the priests taught them.

And many did go to work in great earnestness. Thousands flocked to the monasteries. Hundreds became hermits, dwelling in mountains and forests and living on roots. They fasted; they scourged themselves; they wore coarse clothing; they rose every hour of the night to repeat their prayers; they called the dead saints to their aid. Some slept on pillows of wood; some walked barefooted in the snow; some made pilgrimages to holy places with gravel in the shoes; some hunted down those whom the pope called heretics; some engaged in crusades against the infidels. They sacrificed their earthly goods; they gave acre after acre to purchase the surplus good works of monks and nuns; they gave millions upon millions of dollars to buy papal indulgences, and to pay for the reading of mass for the dead. And what was the fruit of all their labors and all their sacrifices? They were led to dig in dry pits in which was no water, and when they came to die they had to sink into the grave without hope, their conscience bearing them witness that the justice of God could not be satisfied with man's self-chosen works of piety. St. Bernard, as tradition says, founded 160 cloisters and led an excessively stringent life, but when he came to die he set aside all his own works of piety and said: "I have lived evil, and I confess that I cannot obtain the kingdom of heaven by my merits." After a lifetime of labor the people under popery had to experience that it was labor lost, that all their good works could give them no assurance of salvation. It is certainly true that there was still a Church under popery, a company of true believers, whose hope for righteousness was alone in Christ, but they were few and far between, and they were assailed by so many errors and surrounded by such spiritual desolation that they might well complain with the Psalm: "I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert. I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house-top." Ps. 102, 6.

In this doleful time of darkness God prepared a help for His people. He saw the desire of the nations and He awakened

a man to cry out unto them: "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not?" Is. 55, 2. Your works and the pope's indulgences, for which you pay your gold, can nevermore help you into the kingdom. But "hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." Behold, there is an open gateway into the kingdom; God has made it; it is Jesus Christ. He is the propitiation for your sins, and He says: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matt. 11, 28. And by this crying voice the nations of northwestern Europe were awakened to new activity after a sleep of centuries.

As John came unexpectedly from the wilderness to Jordan to preach, even so, while pope Leo X. was indulging himself in luxuries, suddenly a man arose in the very heart of Europe and began to preach the old Gospel. This man had been reared from child up in all the superstitions of the times; in the cloister he had tested all the delusive piety of monkery, and in Italy and Rome he had seen the deep degradation of the clergy. He was an obscure man, little known outside of the Augustinian order of monks, but he soon began to deal heavy blows against popery, and his pen grew until it struck against the tiara of the pope and threatened to thrust it from his head. Many accuse Martin Luther of having been a rough man who had no mercy for the enemies of the truth and assailed his opponents in the coarsest language, and it is true that Luther's maul was no lighter than John the Baptist's sledge-hammer. In his polemical writings against the abominations of Rome, Luther sweeps along like a hurricane. At one place he addresses the pope's defenders in this wise: "Both we and you know, that you live without the Word of God, but we have God's Word. Therefore this is our highest desire and most humble petition, that you would give honor to God and would acknowledge, confess and better yourselves. If you will not, you must suffer me. If I live I will be your pestilence; if I die I will be your death; for God has set me upon you. I must (as Hosea says) be a bear and a lion unto you in the way of

Ashur. You shall have no rest from my name until you better yourselves or go to wreck." * Luther did use hard words against the pope and his clergy, but to be just and fair in our judgment we should never forget what Melancthon says: "The malady of the age required so sharp a physician." What wise general would take a shotgun to assail a fort of a thousand years building? Only by the heaviest kind of cannonading could the stronghold of Rome be broken.

On the other hand, Luther preached the Gospel of salvation by grace most freely. For a quarter of a century I have studied Luther's works, comprising twenty-four large quarto volumes, extensively, and I must testify that I know of no man in old time or new who could speak so lovingly, kindly, comfortingly with troubled and disconsolate hearts as Dr. Martin Luther. I have never found another book, besides the Bible, in which the streams of free grace flowed so abundantly, as in Luther's sermons and commentaries. Samples of his writings I have off and on read from the pulpit. Let me to-day transcribe what another man of God, who for a number of years had to swelter in the oven of spiritual temptations, says of one of Luther's commentaries. It is John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*. In his book "Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners" Bunyan writes:

"God in whose hands are all our days and ways, did cast into my hands, one day, a book of Martin Luther's; it was his comment on the Galatians; it also was so old, that it was ready to fall from piece to piece if I did but turn it over. Now I was pleased much that such an old book had fallen into my hands, the which when I had but a little way perused, I found my condition in his experience, so largely and profoundly handled, as if his book had been written out of my heart. Besides, he doth most gravely in that book, debate of the rise of these temptations, namely, blasphemy, desperation, and the like; shewing that the law of Moses, as well as the devil, death, and hell, hath a very great hand therein; the which at first, was very strange to me, but considering and watching, I found

* See: Exhortation to the Clergy convened at Augsburg anno 1530, § 76.

it so indeed. But of particulars here I intend nothing; only this methinks I must let fall before all men, I do prefer this book of Martin Luther upon the Galatians (excepting the holy Bible) before all the books that ever I have seen, as most fit for a wounded conscience."

Luther knew how to comfort an afflicted heart, because he had himself experienced the siftings of Satan in so high a measure. It is a true picture of Luther when he is represented as a lusty knight dealing heavy blows on an iron gate, but it is even a truer picture of him when the poet describes him as the "Nightingale of Wittenberg."

And of what else did he sing but the forgiveness of sin in Jesus Christ. Virtually the controversy between him and the pope was the same as between John and the Pharisees. The pope put people to work, to work their way into the kingdom, but Luther pointed to Christ, and cried out: This is the Door which the Father hath set in the world that sinners should enter in. Behold the entrance is free; come one, come all. O give heed to the words of the Lord at the end of this text saying: "*He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.*" Have you heard the Gospel which Luther brought to light again? Have you heard it with the ears of the heart, and have you laid hold on the promise in Jesus Christ? If not yet, O then do it to-day. Let neither sin nor morality prevent you to embrace Christ and to say: Thou, and Thou alone art the Door; by Thee I will enter in, and Thou shalt bring me unto the Father. AMEN.

MISSION FESTIVAL.

TEXT: Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof. Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leaven.—Matt. 13, 31-33.

A prominent characteristic of the Christian Church at the present time is zeal for missions, a zeal which is manifest in all parts of Christendom, and a zeal greater than it had been known among Christians for many centuries. The time when zeal for missions, that is zeal for the conversion of the unbelievers, was greatest, were the days of the apostles and in general the three first centuries of the Christian era. Even before John, the last of the apostles, had closed his eyes in death, Christian congregations were scattered over the Roman provinces from Babylon to the extreme west of Europe. This rapid spread of the Gospel was promoted by the fact that almost the whole civilized world was united in one vast empire, which had only two acknowledged languages, the Greek and the Latin. But the chief cause for the quick spread of Christianity was the zeal of the apostolic Christians for the conversion of the heathen. Every one of them counted himself a missionary, and did active mission work among his relatives, friends and neighbors.

When the Roman empire had become Christianized, or rather when Christianity had become the state religion, the zeal for missions soon began to flag, only the Christians in Syria and Persia continued very active and carried the Gospel to India, Tartary and China. In the seventh and eighth centuries the Western or Roman Church again put forth greater activity for the conversion of the heathen. In these and the following

centuries the Anglo-Saxons, Germans and Scandinavians were won for Christianity.

Under the rule of popery the interest of the Christian Church for missions became less and less, until it had almost entirely died out. The popes and prelates showed far greater zeal in persecuting the true followers of Christ than in converting the heathen. In the centuries which we are accustomed to call the Dark Ages, heathenism in fact greatly encroached on Christianity, because heathenish ignorance spread over Christendom, and the saints with their images and relics were worshipped with the Christians similar as the idols with the heathen. Finally God had compassion on His poor, oppressed and downtrodden Church and in the sixteenth century He awakened Martin Luther who again began to teach and to preach the old, apostolic doctrine, and by his labors the reformation of the Church was brought about.

But in the time of the reformation no missionaries were sent to heathen lands by the Protestants. This is in no way surprising, because the cleansing of the Church at home required their whole attention, and in the terrible wars which followed after the reformation the opulence of Germany and other Protestant countries was so thoroughly ruined that the very means to send out missionaries would have been lacking. But where the light of the Gospel shines, it will create a desire for mission work. When the nations of northern Europe had somewhat recuperated from the ravages of the thirty years' war, they began to turn their attention to missions in foreign lands. In the year 1705, the first Lutheran mission in East India, the first of all Protestant missions, was started under the auspices of Frederick IV., king of Denmark. Since that time the interest for missions, both domestic and foreign, has been steadily growing, and now many millions of dollars are annually spent for missions. It is true that this zeal is not always of the right kind, yet it is a zeal for the spreading of Christianity, and as it was a pious Lutheran monarch who sent the first Protestant missionary to the heathen, we Lutherans should certainly be marching in the front ranks in the prosecution of this precious

work. There is a vast and promising field for home missions open to our Church, and the voice of Lutheran missionaries ought to be heard in every heathen land. To promote a lively interest in us for this blessed work let me to-day speak on the question:

WHY SHOULD CHRISTIANS CHEERFULLY CONTRIBUTE TOWARD
THE SUPPORT OF MISSIONS?

From the text read we gather the twofold answer:

- I. Because it is the Nature of Christ's Kingdom to expand and to enlarge its Bounds; and
- II. Because Missions in the Distance are a Blessing to the Church at Home.

I.

The two parables contained in our text both refer to the growth of the kingdom of God, but in different ways. The first, the parable of the mustard seed, describes the outward growth of the Church. The Gospel of Christ conquers heart after heart, invades city after city, and nation after nation, and so the Church is continually spreading abroad over the face of the earth. The second, the parable of the leaven, refers more to the growth of the inner man in the individual Christian, and hence also to the growth of spiritual life in any local church or congregation. Purposely did I read both parables together. The first is this:

"The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof."

If we place a grain of corn and a mustard seed side by side it shows what a diminutive little thing the mustard seed is, and judging by the size of both grains one would think that the grain of corn would produce a plant many times larger than the mustard seed. But in fact it is not so. All things being favorable, the mustard seed will bring forth a plant taller than a tall man, and it will put out branches and will spread like a

tree that in very truth the birds of the air can lodge and even build in it. Plant a mustard seed, which you can scarcely feel between the fingers, in a favorable spot, and after three months you will find it a tree branching out and covering quite a parcel of ground, that no other herb plant can equal it in size and quickness of growth.

As God in nature makes great things out of the small, so also in spiritual things.

The Word which Christ preached was not pleasing to the Jews, and it was but a handful of disciples whose faith failed not when He had poured out His soul unto death. But when that handful of uneducated men were endowed with power from on high and went forth to execute the command: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature," then this new plant began to grow, and to this day it has uninterruptedly continued to strike its roots deeper and to spread its branches wider from age to age. The resources of Rome, the mightiest empire that ever existed on earth, were exhausted to extirpate the kingdom of Christ, but the Caesars with all their power could not even stop its growth. Antichrist set the Gospel the seed from which the Church springs, under a bushel; but notwithstanding all his craftiness and cruelty he could not keep it there; it had to come forth again, to be preached to all nations and kindreds and tongues and peoples, and now the Church of Jesus Christ is become a mighty tree, spreading its branches over all lands and extending even to the uttermost isles of the sea. In the 80th Psalm Asaph sings of the vine which the Lord brought forth out of Egypt: "The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars. She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river." But the Church of the New Testament has made the stakes of her tent far wider. Of her we must say: She came forth from Zion in the land of Judah and she has encircled the round of the heavens. Her line is gone out through all the earth and her words unto the end of the world. There is no people nor nation where the voice of her Bridegroom is not heard.

And what we behold in the Church at large is continually being repeated in certain lands and localities. Our Evangelical Lutheran Church was planted in this western land by little bands of Christians, some of whom had been driven from their native country for the Gospel's sake. They were thankful to God for now being free to worship Him according to His Word, and they dreamed of no great deeds. But God was with them, and He soon caused them to enlarge their tents, and now the Mother Church of the Reformation is a power in the land, a tree stretching its branches from sea to sea.

This is the nature of Christ's kingdom: it grows, expands, enlarges; it is aggressive, and is continually encroaching on the kingdom of Satan. The Word of Christ contains a germ of life and activity which will not suffer it to lie idle. It runs from place to place, making conquest after conquest, as the Psalm says: "His word runneth very swiftly." Ps. 147, 15. The Gospel is the word of invitation to the marriage of the Lamb; it is sent forth that the marriage hall might be filled, and He that sends it will not be foiled. If it is not received at one place He sends it to another. If the dwellers on the avenues decline the invitation He sends His servants to proclaim it in the alleys and to urge it upon them that roam on the highways. This Word will run the rounds of the four winds until the Father's house is filled. It spreads as though carried on angels' wings. Sinners who have embraced it are filled with the desire that others too might be granted the bliss to taste of its sweetness, and it prompts them to do what they can that this saving Word may be brought unto those who have it not. In its very nature the Gospel is a missionary Word, and the true Church of Christ, the community of saints, is in fact a mission society. If the Church were at all times so filled and actuated by the Spirit of Christ as it ought to be, it would do the work spontaneously, and specially organized mission societies would scarcely be necessary to speed the work.

A Lutheran Christian should not rest content when he and his family are provided with the word of God in church and school. There is something lacking, if a Lutheran congregation

looks only after its own home affairs and does not think further than to provide for its own needs. A Lutheran Christian must look beyond his own door-sill; he must take interest in the growth of the Church; he must have a heart for the promotion of the kingdom of God. He should ask: What can I do that the pure doctrine of the Gospel which God has so graciously granted me be brought to others also? Is there a door open, is there a Lutheran mission in which I can aid? Isaiah thus charges the Church: "Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side." Is. 60, 4. Our eyes should not be riveted to our home interests alone, our heart should be large enough to have a place for those that are afar off. When here a handful and there a sheaf is gathered in we should rejoice over the work of the Lord, and we should say one to another: Come, let us unite our prayers and contribute our mites that more laborers may be sent into the harvest, and that the everlasting barns may be filled.

But also in her mission work our Lutheran Church preserves her character of being a truly conservative Church. Lutherans are not like some fanatics who claim to be sent by God to preach everywhere. A true Lutheran will not be "a busybody in other men's matters." 1 Pet. 4, 15. He will not give for the purpose of proselyting among Christians of another name. From the book of Acts we know that it is God who directs missionary work. Our Lutheran Church looks to see where a door is opened unto her, be it far or near, and she will put her hand to that work which is given her to do, and will always do that first which appears most necessary.

Now to our confessional Lutheran Church in this country God has opened a great door, and He clearly shows us where our aid is most urgently needed. In various parts of our country many of our brethren in the faith live scattered abroad, and living scattered, they are without the preaching of the Gospel, and their children grow up without instruction in the saving truth, unless missionaries are sent to travel over the country, and in a measure at least to provide for them. And whose duty is it

to come to the aid of such scattered Lutherans ? It is certainly one of the first and most sacred duties of our Lutheran Church to look after her own scattered children. Here we must not begin to say, people ought not to scatter out so far ; they should not move to places where they can not have preaching and the sacraments. There is some truth in this ; but will it justify us in remaining idle and doing nothing for them ? How does Christ the Savior do ? If one of His fold has gone astray, will He fold His hands and say : It ought not to have gone astray ? Nay, but He is up and doing to follow after that stray one and to win it back. Zealously should our Church walk in His foot-prints, and be ready to make sacrifices and to supply men and means that the bread of life may be broken to her scattered children. It is a duty to send missionaries to the heathen ; but to our American Lutheran Church home mission work among her own starving children is surely the nearest and the most necessary.

But doing the one we should not leave the other undone. Should we, could we fold our hands in idleness while the heathen are sitting in darkness and many thousands in our own land have not yet tasted the sweetness of the Gospel ? Surely, if the Spirit of the Master is in us, if we are His followers indeed, the will of our Lord must be law unto us, and we must be up and doing that the Gospel of Christ may be brought unto men.

II.

But let me hasten to say a word on the second parable in our text : *"The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened."*

While the Word of Christ is like a mustard seed producing a great and spreading plant, it is at the same time also a leaven which, when it has taken hold on a man, works and leavens the whole man and more and more makes him a new creature from heart, soul, mind and all his powers. Yet without entering in full on the merits of this beautiful comparison, let me here only ask : Why does the Lord connect these two parables, the one

treating of the external, the other of the internal growth of the Church? Certainly, because both stand in the most intimate relation, promote one another, illustrate one another and in fact are in a measure dependent upon each other.

It has already been mentioned, and this is a fact which history abundantly proves, that a church which is void of missionary spirit will also lack the proper zeal in behalf of the work of the kingdom of Christ at home, while, on the other hand, the children of the household will not be the worse for the willing hearts and open hands sending the bread of life beyond the waters. Helping to build the kingdom of heaven in other regions reminds us of looking to the salvation of our own souls, lest we help others and ourselves become castaways. If we assist in sending the saving Word to those who crave it and have it not, we are exhorted ourselves to appreciate it the more. If we read of little success in a mission field, it must remind us of our own hardness of heart, and if missionaries report of people traveling many miles to hear a sermon, we must feel ashamed, if we ourselves are often absent from the house of God, when we might and should be there. When a Christian gives for a mission he is prompted to accompany the gift with a prayer; for what is an offering without a blessing upon it? Where there is little or nothing to do, people become indolent; but where there is much to do, they are kept moving and active. A church which takes an active part in the interests of the Church at large, chiefly in the spreading of the kingdom of God, thereby promotes its own spiritual growth and welfare. Jesus Christ would have His Gospel preached to every creature, and He will bless every Christian and every congregation enlisting in His service with heart and hand to promote the work of missions.

Becoming over-satiated is a peculiar danger threatening those who have the Gospel preached to them abundantly. The Gospel is apt to become an every-day thing to them which they do not much appreciate, as we rarely return thanks for every-day blessings. But if Christians take an active part in supporting missions they will, as a natural consequence, hear and read often of the deplorable condition in which the heathen are, and

it will be an object lesson to them, picturing the great treasure which they possess. So the money which they send over the waters returns to them again in blessing to their own soul. And the more a Christian reads of the miserable depravity of heathen nations, the more will he be prompted to argue: There is only one thing which can truly help the heathen, and are you not willing to go down into your pocket and to give another dollar to send the Gospel unto them?

And when we do contribute a little money for the support of missions let us not flatter ourselves that we are doing an extraordinary work which it is not actually our duty to do. If we are leavened with the Spirit of the Gospel we must feel it our duty to make others partakers with us of the heavenly treasure. Certainly we are debtors "both to the Jews and to the Greeks." Now we cannot all go out as missionaries, but we can aid in providing those with the necessary means who are willing to stake their lives for the cause of Christ. If we cannot go ourselves we should do our part that others can be sent.

And when we do send others our prayers should go with them. A mite given with a praying heart is more in the sight of God than a handful of gold which a rich man gives and then thinks that he has performed his whole duty. In our daily prayers we should never fail to include our missionaries both at home and abroad, beseeching God to bless their labors and through their word to cause the light of life to shine into the hearts of those who are sitting in the shadow of death. Lord Jesus, who alone art the true Light of men, enlighten our hearts and all the ends of the earth with the light of Thy Gospel.
AMEN.

Spread, O spread, thou mighty Word,
Spread the kingdom of the Lord,
That in earth's remotest bound
Men may hear Thy joyful sound.

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